

EIJI AONUMA ON
NINTENDO'S
NEED TO EVOLVE

APPLE'S 2013
MACBOOK AIR
REFRESH

PLUS: Q&A WITH
MINECRAFT'S
MARKUS PERSSON

Distro

061413 #95

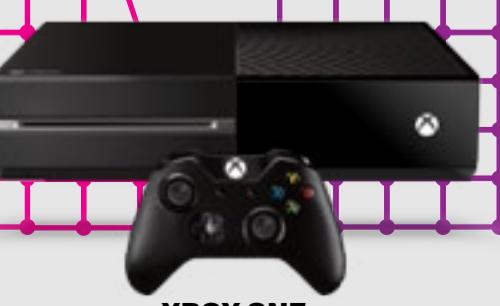
engadget 

INSIDE THE PAST,
PRESENT AND
FUTURE OF GAMING

E3 2013



Wii U

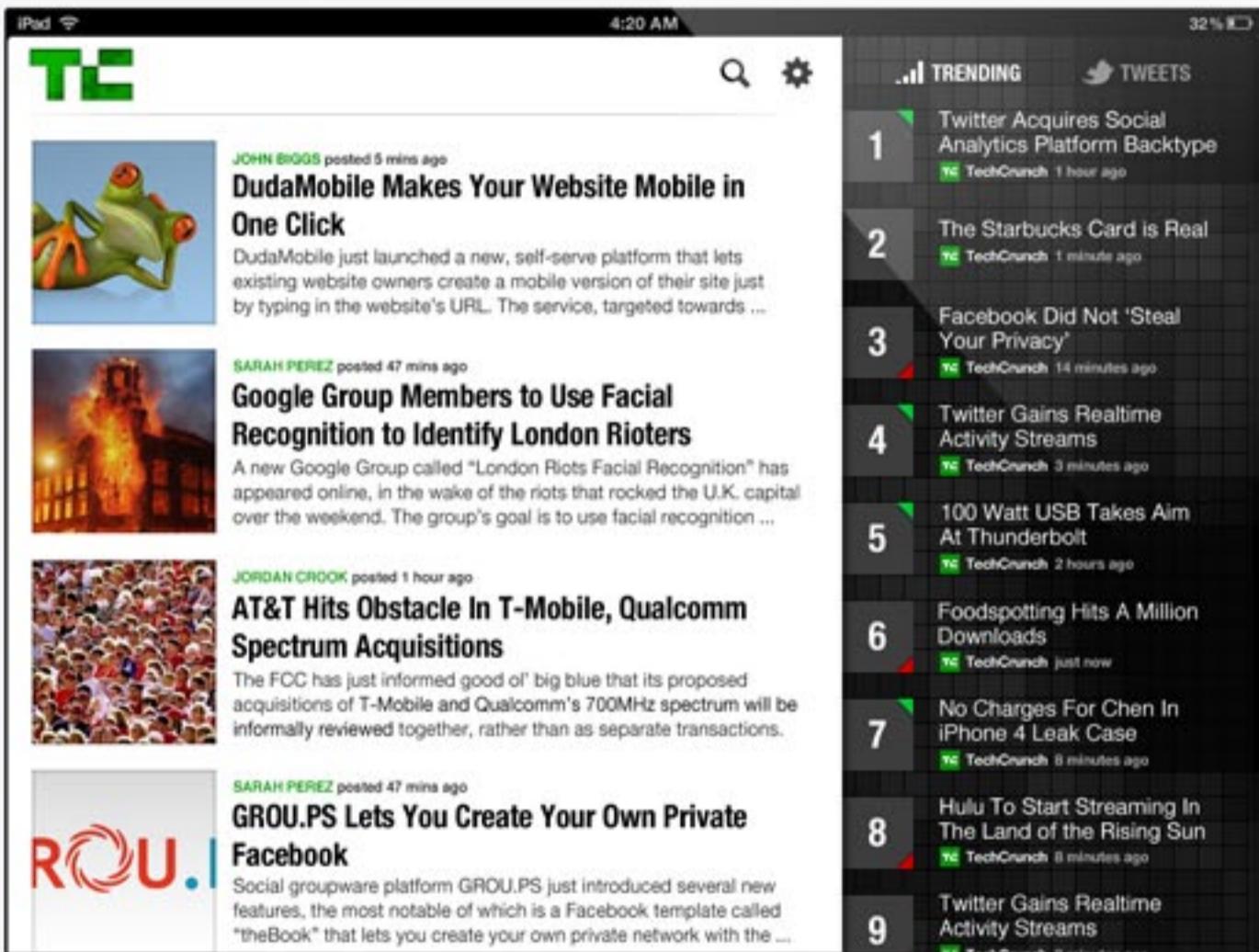


XBOX ONE



PS4



iPad 4:20 AM 32% 

JOHN BIGGS posted 5 mins ago

DudaMobile Makes Your Website Mobile in One Click

DudaMobile just launched a new, self-serve platform that lets existing website owners create a mobile version of their site just by typing in the website's URL. The service, targeted towards ...

SARAH PEREZ posted 47 mins ago

Google Group Members to Use Facial Recognition to Identify London Rioters

A new Google Group called "London Riots Facial Recognition" has appeared online, in the wake of the riots that rocked the U.K. capital over the weekend. The group's goal is to use facial recognition ...

JORDAN CROOK posted 1 hour ago

AT&T Hits Obstacle In T-Mobile, Qualcomm Spectrum Acquisitions

The FCC has just informed good ol' big blue that its proposed acquisitions of T-Mobile and Qualcomm's 700MHz spectrum will be informally reviewed together, rather than as separate transactions.

SARAH PEREZ posted 47 mins ago

GROU.PS Lets You Create Your Own Private Facebook

Social groupware platform GROU.PS just introduced several new features, the most notable of which is a Facebook template called "theBook" that lets you create your own private network with the ...

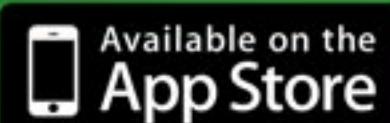
TRENDING **TWEETS**

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- 2 The Starbucks Card is Real TechCrunch 1 minute ago
- 3 Facebook Did Not 'Steal Your Privacy' TechCrunch 14 minutes ago
- 4 Twitter Gains Realtime Activity Streams TechCrunch 3 minutes ago
- 5 100 Watt USB Takes Aim At Thunderbolt TechCrunch 2 hours ago
- 6 Foodspotting Hits A Million Downloads TechCrunch just now
- 7 No Charges For Chen In iPhone 4 Leak Case TechCrunch 8 minutes ago
- 8 Hulu To Start Streaming In The Land of the Rising Sun TechCrunch 8 minutes ago
- 9 Twitter Gains Realtime Activity Streams TechCrunch 8 minutes ago

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DISTRO

06.14.13

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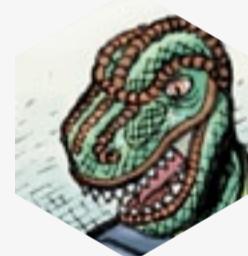
ESC



VISUALIZED
On the Floor at E3



Q&A
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REHASHED
Watching the Watchmen, iTuning In and the Porto Pro

TM

TIME MACHINES
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E3 VS. WWDC

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EDITOR'S
LETTER

ONE MAJOR PRESS EVENT going on means we need to get our game faces on. Two happening simultaneously? Hoo boy, that raises the stakes. This year we had full teams on the ground in both San Francisco and Los Angeles for the dueling media extravaganzas that were E3 and WWDC. In one, we learned a lot about two incredible new gaming systems and saw dozens of fantastic new games. In the other? Two new important operating systems, one new laptop and a new desktop that even Mac haters will have to admit is quite a thing.

We'll start with WWDC, since I was actually there for that one, and the biggest news of the day was the long-awaited unveiling of iOS 7. Apple reps were merciless in their ire toward the former versions' skeuomorphic tendencies, poking fun at the green velvet, the mock stitching and the faux surfaces that previously played such a big part of the iPhone and iPad experience. Now things are rather simpler — and a bit more abstract.

iOS 7 is typified by a somewhat more muted color palette and a cunning use of frosted, semi-transparent overlays for things like the keyboard and the new Control Center, which slides up from the bottom of the display with a flick of the thumb and lets you quickly toggle things like WiFi and display brightness. Multitasking is far more comprehensive; a double-tap of the Home button showing you webOS card-like views of all the running applications.



“Apple reps were merciless in their ire toward the former versions’ skeuomorphic tendencies, poking fun at the green velvet, the mock stitching and the faux surfaces that previously played such a big part of the iPhone and iPad...”

I think it looks beautiful, personally, but I can't help being disappointed by the lack of new functionality. Siri got a few new commands, sure, and overall it'll be a nicer OS to live with, but I was really hoping for a new keyboard, a handful of new gestures and, most importantly, a lot more extensibility for developers. There are a zillion new APIs for them to learn, but Apple still didn't announce in-app integration for Siri, for example, or support for third-party keyboards. Maybe there's still time to shoehorn something in before it all launches this fall.

OS X Mavericks was the other big unveiling, a rather less spectacular, but solid update to Apple's venerable PC operating system — and the beginning of a new naming scheme that will highlight favorite locales around California. I confess to thinking that “Mavericks” is an odd moniker for a pretty predictable set of new features, including tabbed Finder windows and better multi-monitor support, but the promise of significantly improved battery life

from better CPU management is certainly promising.

Paving the way for that is the new Intel Haswell CPU-equipped MacBook Air, which was surprisingly the only laptop unveiled at the event. (We'd expected the Retina MacBook Pros would also see a refresh.) The new Air is virtually identical to the old, having only faster SSD storage and the new class of CPU. The result? Far better I/O performance and hugely improved battery life. The 13-inch Air logged an amazing 12 hours and 51 minutes on our battery rundown test.

Finally, there's the new Mac Pro, a cylinder of polished black aluminum containing a 12-core Intel Xeon E5 processor with DDR3 RAM and PCIe storage. As the machine is rather svelte, expandability will be mostly external, enabled by a whopping six Thunderbolt 2.0 ports. Perhaps best of all? It'll be assembled here in the US. No pricing or availability was announced, but it won't be cheap, you can bet on that.

Moving on to E3, we finally got all



“The Xbox One will need to phone home over an active internet connection once a day for any downloaded or locally copied games to keep working.”

the details on this fall's gaming powerhouses: the Xbox One and the PlayStation 4. Well, almost all the details. The Xbox One will launch in November for \$499, while the PlayStation 4 will launch “this holiday season” for \$399. Instant victory for Sony? Not so fast: the PS4 doesn't include the \$59 Eye camera, while the Xbox One includes Kinect. Not only does that reduce the price delta between them, but it also means that Sony's camera likely won't see much support in games, while Microsoft's should.

That said, Microsoft's handling of rights-management issues is definitely drawing a lot of ire. The Xbox One will need to phone home over an active internet connection once a day for any downloaded or locally copied games to keep working. This has, un-

surprisingly, resulted in a lot of hate online, to which Microsoft's Xbox chief Don Mattrick had this to say: “We have a product for people who aren't able to get some form of connectivity; it's called Xbox 360.” Cute. The PS4, meanwhile, has no such restrictions built in, but Sony did leave room for game publishers to add their own restrictions if they like.

And that's all I have time to cover this week, dear readers, but there's plenty more to be found in this week's issue of Distro. We have Sean Buckley's feature on the evolution of E3, Ben Gilbert's look at the sad state of the Wii U and we sit down with *Zelda* producer Eiji Aonuma to find out what's in store for Nintendo's future. We've also got a review of the new MacBook Air refresh and plenty of news and impressions from the E3 show floor. Ross Rubin looks at the policies of the PlayStation 4 in *Switched On* while Joshua Fruhlinger weighs in on which horse he's putting his money on for the console fight in *Modem World*. And, if that weren't enough, *Minecraft* creator Notch Persson does Q&A. Enjoy — but watch out for the creepers. ▶



TIM STEVENS
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF,
ENGADGET



CAR CLUTTER, ECOSYSTEM TRAPS AND A TABLET FOR THE TUB

DISTRO
06.14.13

Touch article names
to read full threads

INBOX



PNDs TRY TO
FIND THEIR WAY
ISSUE 94,
JUNE 7TH, 2013

"Since Google came out with navigation, I haven't once used my Magellan GPS, and I'm not really sure I am ever going to again.

The only thing my Magellan had that I wish my phone had was an ability to go from empty to fully charged in a couple hours WHILE using the GPS. If I accidentally let my phone run out of

"Too many types of cell phones, few real mounting options that end up turning your car into a K-Mart electronic clearance sale. PNDs work all the time you have power. There is something to be said for having a wealth of local (on device) information that doesn't require cell radio service to work. Maybe in major cities, cellphone navigation works well, but get out in the mountains and open rural land and you will find zero service. Offline is becoming more prevalent, but I'm not sure it's there yet. I hope to keep my Garmin Montana around for a very long time with its hi-res topo maps."

— JOSHUA PROVENCE

juice, the choice becomes charge or use GPS. I'm so rooting for USB 3.0 high current charging to make

it to phones. That will probably be the next time I upgrade my phone."

— JOEL



SO WHAT'S NEXT?

ISSUE 94,
JUNE 7TH, 2013

"I believe it's caused by their young generation people. I love their clam-shell phone, the design are miles ahead compared to the rest of the world. I even have one (Panasonic P-02b). All of their phones have a 1-seg tuner which enable the user to watch TV without having to stream."

- IKNOWWHATYOUIDTHERE

"The simple fact is that Japanese companies stopped innovating as their domestic economy stagnated. 15 years ago my home was full of Japanese electronics, now I barely have anything. The Koreans and Chinese have replaced Japan as the Far East powerhouses and the Europeans and Americans have caught up. That's just the way things are. Everything goes round in cycles. I'm sure the Japanese companies will come back fighting in the future."

- AREWETHEREYET

SONY XPERIA TABLET Z

ISSUE 94,
JUNE 7TH, 2013

"Waterproof e-book reader!!! That's what you'd have by the pool or at the beach. You can't see these outside. Ok, maybe this would be cool in the tub, but that's about it."

- JONYAH

"Or, maybe, we can simply call it 'globalization.'"

- THE_SAWDUST

MSI GT70 DRAGON

EDITION 2

ISSUE 94,
JUNE 7TH, 2013

"If I had a laptop with those kinds of hardware specs, I couldn't give a crap about how it looks."

- BUB

VERIZON INNOVATION

CENTER

ISSUE 94,
JUNE 7TH, 2013

"Verizon is getting

knocked for trying to rise above the other carriers and do something new; if they're successful the other carriers will have their own versions.

It's called 'the path to innovation' (also expanded revenue streams.)"

- SLICK312

"A dumb pipe should be our end goal. I applaud Verizon for doing interesting R&D, but it wants all of these products to exist in a closed ecosystem like phones do today, which means you're adding 10-15 bucks a month to your VZW bill



for every one of those things, as opposed to just paying for the bandwidth and using any product you want.

Unified standards! Interoperability! This is what is good for consumers. A ‘smart pipe’ is only going to try to outsmart the market.”

—THESCRIVENER

“No, this is Verizon doing their best to create ‘solutions’ for nonexistent problems so they can charge even more overage fees when your network-connected refrigerator and lawn sprinkler exceeds your capped / shared data plan.”

—ZOMBIEKITTY

THE ENGADGET
INTERVIEW: DAVID COPE
ISSUE 94,
JUNE 7TH, 2013

“This is brilliant.

But, to be honest, while the machines can be creative, they don’t have what makes us human yet: emotions and understanding of what is beautiful. It’s still up to the human to eval-

uate the pieces this machine creates and only with human input it can learn.

Therefore, it’s an interesting tool, but it’s just a tool.”

—BWOHAHA

“Wow, never thought I’d see his name again. I took his class on Music and AI in college. Lots of interesting concepts. The class was meant for anyone but taught you to manipulate MIDI with Lisp for your final project. He was a very interesting guy.”

—M00083



ENTER

EYES-ON

**MAD CATZ
F.L.Y. 9**

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WIRELESS FLIGHT

Gaming peripherals come in all shapes, sizes and form factors, but the Mad Catz F.L.Y. 9 brings some modern aeronautical stylings and custom configurations to the table. Plus, the unit seen here connects to Xbox 360 consoles without the need to remain tethered.

THE DAMAGE: \$130



ENTER

EYES-ON

MAD CATZ
F.L.Y. 9

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AERO AESTHETICS

The F.L.Y. 9 not only offers the feel of cockpit controls, but does so with modern aerospace aesthetics in tow.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILL LIPMAN



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EYES-ON

MAD CATZ
F.L.Y. 9

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ADJUSTABLE CONTROLS

In addition to onboard throttle and rudder controls, the handle length, rake angle and head angle are all adjustable for precision.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILL LIPMAN



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EYES-ON

MAD CATZ
F.L.Y. 9

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BASE CAMP

Removable feet make the base of the F.L.Y. 9 both lap- and desktop-ready whenever the next combat mission calls.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILL LIPMAN

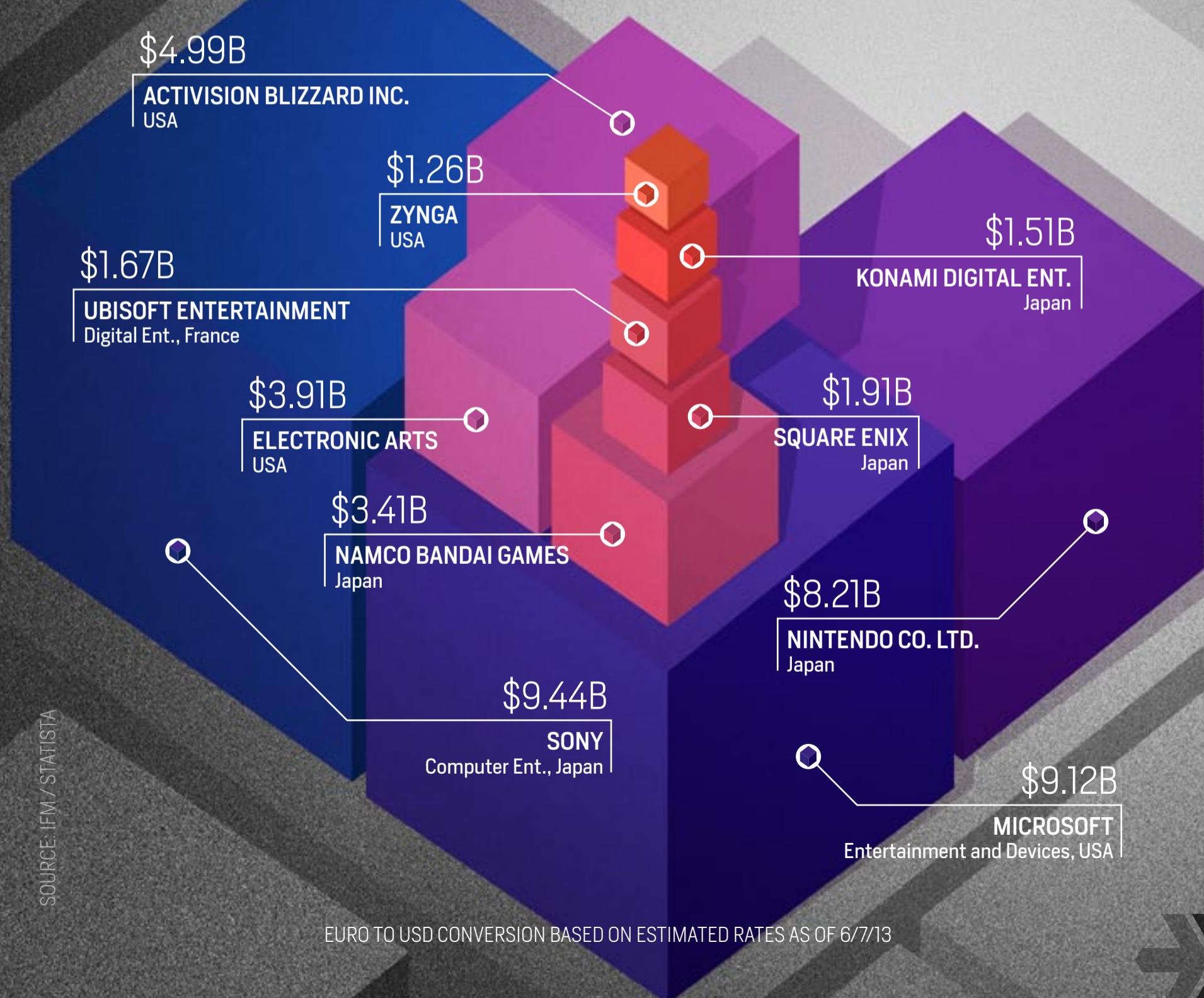


Gaming's Big Money Makers

Financial stakes are high in the gaming industry and analysts at Germany's IFM offer some perspective in their recent report on the revenue of the top 10 gaming publishers worldwide for 2012. Sony made the biggest bank with \$9.4 billion and Microsoft was close behind at \$9.1 billion. Nintendo rounded out the

top three followed by multiplatform game makers like Activision and EA. Zynga, of *Farmville* fame, held onto the 10th spot with \$1.3 billion, but as its competitors begin to focus more on sharing and the mobile space — and as it struggles with corporate restructuring — it will definitely need to step up its game. — *Jon Turi*

REVENUES FOR TOP 10 GLOBAL GAMING PUBLISHERS IN 2012





Inside the World's Most Ambitious Eco-City

By Dan Baum
Popular Science

It reads a bit like science fiction, but Masdar City is a real place in the United Arab Emirates where visitors are forced to leave their cars at the city's edge and then proceed in driverless "Personal Rapid Transit pods." That's just one of the measures the government-funded project — expected

to be completed in 2025 at a cost of some \$18 billion — is taking in an attempt to earn itself the title of the most eco-friendly city on the planet. As *Popular Science*'s Dan Baum explains, the project is also betting big on solar power and other types of alternative energy, which it hopes to be a hub for, attracting researchers and investors alike. It also, unsurprisingly, still has a long ways to go before 2025, when it's promised to be home to some 40,000 people and serve as a model for other cities.



Click on
headlines
to read full
stories

Solving the Mystery of PRISM

By Marc Ambinder
The Week

We may well know even more about PRISM by the time this is published, but one of the best pieces of background reading on the subject to date came courtesy of this primer of sorts from Marc Ambinder, who breaks down how the system works — based on what we know so far — and who uses it.

Silent War

By Michael Joseph Gross
Vanity Fair

A look at another side of internet security matters, this piece from Michael Joseph Gross for *Vanity Fair* offers some extensive reporting on the rise in cyber-warfare, examining a number of recent attacks and the "black-market digital arms bazaar" that's causing them to spread even further.

Call of the Wild

By Alex Hutchinson
The Walrus

We've featured essays on how technology is changing our relationship to the wilderness here before, and this one from Alex Hutchinson offers yet another perspective, examining his own experience leaving the latest gear behind and similar scenarios decades earlier during the era of two-way radio.

Creating Recipes with Artificial Intelligence

By Valerie Ross
IEEE Spectrum

You've no doubt read plenty about Watson's post-*Jeopardy!* endeavors — ranging from medicine to finance — but this effort from IBM's cognitive computing team may be the most surprising to date. As Valerie Ross explains, they're now working with chefs on an artificial intelligence able to produce recipes.



THE SUBTEXTS OF APPLE'S WWDC KEYNOTE



EDITORIAL

DISTRO
06.14.13

FORUM

BY BRAD HILL

MONDAY'S MUCH-ANTICIPATED WWDC

Monday's much-anticipated WWDC keynote was Apple's most crucial presentation in years. AAPL stock has fallen 37 percent over nine months. Android has grown into a monstrous competing platform, differentiating along the lines of lower cost, variety of devices and appealing operating-system features. In this sharp-elbowed

environment, Apple has been widely accused of losing its innovation mojo, and of over-reaching with premium product concepts and prices, in what is increasingly viewed as a commodity tech category.

Facing an audience of developers whose businesses depend on Apple's continued success, especially in the mobile realm, the company's keynote mission was not only to excite buzz around new products, but to establish clarity around the company's mission, values and key competitive advantages. Did it succeed?

The WWDC keynote is always targeted to two audiences: the platform developers who are starting a weeklong

immersion in Apple software, and consumers (including press) who want to know what Apple devices are going to look like in six months. The keynote must keep developers hooked into Apple's value as a business partner, and keep all other observers hooked on Apple's upcoming gadget candy.

This year's WWDC keynote was expected to reveal details of the next iOS version, and updates to other products. The presentation did both. Equally important was the underlying messaging. Seemingly offhand, but carefully crafted one-liners made laser-sharp separations from the Steve Jobs era, especially



regarding skeuomorphic design philosophies that define iOS 6 artwork. Sharp digs drew appreciative laughter. Most of those came from Craig Federighi, SVP of software engineering, who demoed pre-views of Safari and iOS 7. “We just completely ran out of green felt, and wood as well,” he remarked when displaying the next version of Game Center. “That’s got to be good for the environment.” The live video stream cut to a shot of Al Gore, who appeared to be hanging on every word.

Complementing Federighi’s throw-away laughers were a couple of sharp responses to Apple’s most thorny public criticisms. Phil Schiller, SVP of marketing, threw a spear back at the post-Jobs innovation cynics with the rousing declamation, “Can’t innovate anymore my ass!” That war cry came during the introduction of the Mac Pro, Apple’s bulked-up desktop for power users. In the same segment, Schiller quietly addressed persistent issues and negative press around tech products (not only Apple’s) being produced in offshore sweatshops, by noting that the Mac Pro is “conceived and built in America.”

That is no small point for Apple, though not a new one either. Whether or not in response to its overseas labor difficulties, the company seems to be planting its identity stake more firmly in American soil, at least in its sculpting of public perception. A new television ad, premiered at the keynote, is titled “Designed by Apple in California” — a years-old tagline that appears on

“The new ad is a powerful piece of perceptual marketing, a mission-defining claim that sensitive technology uplifts life.”

the back of iPads and iPhones... with a second part: “Assembled in China.” Bringing the first half up to prominence while leaving the inevitable second part lost in small print is a deliberate piece of image-making.

Let’s focus on that ad. It is succinct, deliberate, emotional. It’s like a Captain Pike speech — both homely and exalted. In 62 seconds, and 68 words, it equates glittering metal-and-glass technology with the enhancement of bedrock life values. “How will it make someone feel? Will it make life better? Does it deserve to exist?” Any advertising agency might concoct such an aspirational association between a phone and the meaning of life, but it’s especially important for a company that needs to continue banking on a premium market that yields premium margins. The differences between iOS and Android are pretty fine in the mainstream. Android



“Apple is doubling down on its perceived value — a designer of premium lifestyle technology for everyone.”

OEMs are in the business of high unit volumes and low margins. Apple's differentiation play depends as much on perceived value as it does on product specs. The new ad is a powerful piece of perceptual marketing, a mission-defining claim that sensitive technology uplifts life.

Well-received as it was in the keynote hall, the TV ad played second chair to another video which described the design principles of iOS 7. Upgrading the decidedly musty mobile interface was a hope and expectation among the discipleship and pundit class alike. Here, the future was cleaved from the past with precision and eloquence by Jony Ive, SVP of industrial design, the leader of Apple's look-and-feel modernization. There was expansive language in this film, as there was in the TV ad: “There is a profound and enduring beauty in simplicity, in clarity, in efficiency ... more than just the absence of clutter and ornamentation ... it is about bringing order to complexity.”

The multitudes were wild for this rhetoric, but the punctuating cheers were timed to visual glimpses of the iOS 7 design elements: the flat iconography, the translucency, the new Control Center — all of which everyone

hoped for, and perhaps feared would not be there. I heard relief.

I started by saying the 2013 WWDC keynote was crucial, because Apple is at a crossroads. Competitive pressure is intense, and investor confidence is shaky. Apple's choice is whether or not to throw in with the commodity view — reduce margins and sell more product. The keynote's messaging rejected that path forthrightly. At times, the subtext became explicit. Tim Cook asserted that iOS users spend more time in their phones than users of competing platforms: “People love them more. That's what is important to us.”

Apple is doubling down on its perceived value — a designer of premium lifestyle technology for everyone. Atop the subtext, though, the actual feature improvements promoted in the WWDC keynote fall well within a framework of status quo. Samsung, Apple's fiercest smartphone competitor, is plumbing the depths of status quo with a tiered product lineup that recognizes a consumer appetite for sub-premium. Samsung's Galaxy Ace 3 (price unknown) was announced just before WWDC. Perhaps it was a pre-emptive reminder that a phone is just a phone, regardless of how Apple glorifies its role in our lives. ➤



THE FIVE P'S OF THE PS4

DISTRO
06.14.13

FORUM

SWITCHED
ON

BY ROSS RUBIN

Throughout the history of home game consoles, it's been notoriously difficult for a leader in one generation to maintain its leadership in the next generation. Sony, for example, went from dominance of the sixth-generation console market, knocking Sega out of the hardware business as Microsoft was gearing up for the original Xbox, to a third-place finish in terms of installed base with its seventh-generation entry, the PlayStation 3. Last November, Switched On discussed how Nintendo turned its back on much of what made the Wii a success, at least in that console's early days. Sony, though, seems to have carefully studied the lessons of the PlayStation 3 and has made many changes in the PlayStation 4 to address that console's challenges.

THE PROCESSOR

The impressive multi-core Cell processor developed in conjunction with Toshiba powered the PlayStation 3. Few debated

that the Cell was extremely powerful, but it had a reputation of being difficult to develop for. With the PlayStation 4, Sony has moved to an x86-based archi-





Sony's long-awaited console refresh, the PS4.

ecture for the first time. In a bit of serendipity for cross-platform development, Microsoft, too, has switched back to an x86 processor architecture after a dalliance with PowerPC in the Xbox 360. In some ways, Microsoft has even more to gain from this since it should facilitate game development across Xbox One hardware and Windows PCs. That said, the switch in processors hasn't meant a retreat from Sony's historical focus on horsepower, as there's a strong case, at least on paper, for the PlayStation 4 to be the most powerful of the eighth-generation consoles.

THE PURCHASE

The first PlayStation 3s had dedicated hardware to support running PlayStation 2 games natively. But that was an expense Sony cut as it sought to bring the PlayStation's price down. With the switch in processors, backward compatibility between the PlayStation 4 and PlayStation 3 isn't practical; Sony will use its purchase of Gaikai to stream a back catalog of PlayStation 3 and older titles from the cloud. It remains to be seen how well this will actually work in the real world, but it should provide some bridge to the past.

THE PRICE

The inclusion of the then-novel Blu-ray drive helped to make the PlayStation 3, with its original 60GB version debuting at \$599, one of the most expensive consoles at launch. (The Neo Geo Advanced Entertainment System, which debuted in North America in 1991, cost \$649.) Not only was price a setback, but the reliance on the difficult-to-source drives resulted in supply shortages for those willing to pay for the beefy console. At the 2013 E3, though, Sony announced that it would be pricing the PlayStation 4 at \$399, landing it squarely between the \$299 Nintendo Wii U and the \$499 Xbox One. Of course, the Xbox One includes the formerly separate Kinect, which brings us to...

THE PERIPHERAL

Adding Sony's PlayStation Eye camera will tack another \$59 onto the PlayStation 4's purchase price. The Eye can't do everything Kinect can do. Furthermore, it's too early to pass judgment on how much Kinect will contribute to the Xbox One as an integrated part of the system beyond such ancillary or non-gaming tasks like serving up slick player

“The key difference is that the PlayStation 4, unlike the Xbox One, won’t require a daily check-in to validate licenses.”

identification, enabling video chat and acting as a TV remote control. Integrating what could be considered a peripheral is always a tough decision. Including motion control helped to make the original Wii a hit, while including a tablet as a second screen hasn’t driven interest in the Wii U. In any case, making the Eye a separate purchase, though, helps to give Sony the price advantage over Microsoft.

THE POLICIES

Of course, depending on how many titles one buys, the initial console purchase is only a percentage of what one will spend on a platform over its lifetime. Sony won cheers at its E3 event for noting that it wouldn’t employ any new provisions for preventing used disc-based game sales. However, Microsoft has basically said the same thing in that it is up to the publisher to determine such policies. If a third-party publisher wants to enforce provisions

around used game sales, they may well find their own ways to do so. The key difference is that the PlayStation 4, unlike the Xbox One, won’t require a daily check-in to validate licenses. And even that has been created with an eye toward having digital content available from virtually anywhere.

The game, so to speak, hasn’t even begun. The next year will see how factors such as exclusives, third-party (including indie) support, clip sharing and cloud gaming affect the industry. For now, however, Sony’s announcement — or at least the way it made it — combined with the PS4’s tradeoff of a lower price for the lack of an included camera has given it the upper hand in terms of a perception advantage. With its pricing splitting the difference between the flagging Wii U and the potentially overreaching Xbox One, the PlayStation 4 could once again put Sony back on top in the home console market. ➤



THE CONSOLE WAR IS OVER... SORTA



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06.14.13

FORUM

THIS IS THE
MODEM WORLD

BY JOSHUA FRUHLINGER

IT SEEEMS, AT LEAST according to the editorial and social rhetoric I've read over the past few days, that the console war has ended before a single unit has sold, and the Sony PlayStation 4 has won. Meanwhile, after a series of questionable announcements and policies, Microsoft's Xbox One is a battered warrior before it's had a chance to make an appearance.

It is, of course, silly to predict or even recognize this, but I'm going to do so anyway. Why? It's worth mentioning why gamers have — at least for now — turned their backs to Microsoft. The issues are numerous, and they all point to features and functionalities that hardcore gamers don't want, don't get or simply don't like. Average consumers haven't chimed in yet — they will do so at the register this fall once they've asked the likes of you and me what to get — but here's a very quick look at what troubles the Xbox One and how the PlayStation 4 appears to be doing things right.

DRM

We all saw this coming, and now that it's here, our torches are raised in defiance at Castle Microsoft. For those not in the know, Xbox One requires an always-on connection and games will be installed to one console at a time. This led many to believe that this would kill the Xbox One's used game market, but a recently posted FAQ from Microsoft states, vaguely, that they are "designing Xbox One to enable customers to trade in and resell games. We'll have more details to share later."



“That’s not *always* on, but it sure means you need to be near a connection to do anything longer than a day.”

This probably means that they are in meetings trying to figure out how to get around this one, coming up with said details as I write this. They promise no fee, but they are saying that they’ll leave a lot of this up to publishers. Perhaps we’ll have to uninstall our game before selling it, which then re-opens that license up to the person who buys the used game. Perhaps we won’t be able to sell our games at all. Either way, retail spots probably aren’t going to want to deal with the mishegas.

We’re told that we’ll be able to “lend” our game to one person at a time, giving him access to our library and then revoking the privileges when that person is done (or when we want to give someone else access). Whether this will work remains to be seen, but this is certainly a lot more restrictive — by a millionfold — than the “here, take this disc / cartridge” culture gamers have grown used to.

But all isn’t rainbows and unicorns on the PlayStation 4 side. Sony just

announced that, while its first-party games won’t include any form of DRM, third-party developers would be free to do as they please on that front. We’d like to assume that those third parties are seeing, hearing and reading reactions to all of this and will drop any notions of doing something similar, but it wouldn’t surprise me if larger studios required licenses and connections — just like the One versions — once the dust settles.

And really, in the end, we’ve become used to DRM by now, haven’t we? The mobile apps we purchase, the Xbox Live and PSN and WiiWare games we download — those are all DRM’d to the gills. Disc-based games are on their last legs, and while I don’t like it, the writing is on the wall for an industry always looking for ways to monetize our gaming selves. We could be fighting a losing battle on this front, my friends.

ALWAYS ON

While the term “always on” is being floated around, it’s a bit misleading in that the Xbox One will only need to connect to the internet once every 24 hours to play games. That’s not *always* on, but it sure means you need to be near a connection do anything longer than a day. This is essentially a security check, and it’s unprecedented. It’s understandable that it’s leaving a bad taste in consumers’ mouths. To add insult to injury, Xbox Chief Don Mattrick told the world that if you can’t get on-



“As of now, it’s \$499, and while it includes Kinect, it’s more. In fact, many people don’t want Kinect, especially since the console will be always on...”

line, stick with the Xbox 360. Yeesh.

While the PlayStation 4 will always be in a sleep mode and available for wake at the touch of a button, it won’t require a connection to run. Call it “always present.” But it won’t require any sign-in, online access to work. This sounds like — well, it sounds like a game console, and that’s within peoples’ comfort zones. Keep in mind this could all change with a software update in the future and by then we might not all care. But for now, we like the notion of a console that’s just that.

PRICING

Like it or not, Kinect or Eye or not, the base price of the PlayStation 4 is \$100 less than the Xbox One. And \$100 is another game, another controller, another month of internet service. The \$399 price point has always been a

psychological wall for a game console — in fact, PS3 sales shot up once it hit that amount last time around, and one has to assume Sony learned from its past mistakes.

There are rumors — let’s call them dreams — that Microsoft may release a subsidized version of the One at a lower price as long as you sign up for Live, but I’m not holding my breath. As of now, it’s \$499, and while it includes Kinect, it’s more. In fact, many people don’t want Kinect, especially since the console will be always on, watching us. That’s kinda creepy, no?

BUT IT’S ALL GOOD

More than anything, despite all the flak that Microsoft is getting over the One, I’m excited that we’re finally entering the next console generation. It seems the 360, PS3 and Wii were with us forever, and I’m ready to leave them behind and get my hands on some new silicon, franchises and fanboy discourse.

As annoyed as we all may seem when discussing such things, let’s admit it: We love this. It’s like elections every four years, filled with half-truths, inexplicable discourse, corporate doublespeak and unfulfilled promises. I know I’ll be enjoying the next few months as details are revealed, hopes are crushed and new dreams (shall we call them *Final Fantasies*? Sorry...) are realized.

And of course I’ll be a lot poorer come this holiday season. I’m betting you will be, too. ➤



MACBOOK AIR
(13-INCH,
MID-2013)

Apple's **MacBook Air** nabs Haswell internals and speedier SSDs, but what about a Retina display?
By Tim Stevens

We can't lie: we were hoping for a Retina MacBook Air last year when Apple rolled out the thinner, faster MacBook Pros with their pixel-packed displays and optical drive-free chassis. The Air, sadly, got left out of that particular party, but when we reviewed it we found a perfectly fine machine. This year, then, would surely be the year of major updates to Apple's venerable thin-and-light machine?

As it turns out, no, it wouldn't be. From the outside, the mid-2013 MacBook Air refresh is again a very minor one indeed, with no new dis-



play and (virtually) no exterior modifications. On the inside, though, bigger changes are afoot. New, faster SSDs and a selection of power-sipping Haswell CPUs from Intel have created a device that's all but identical to its predecessor yet is, in many ways, vastly improved. Is this wedge-like, 13-inch paradox worth your \$1,099, and can it really live up to Apple's promised 12-hour battery life? Let's find out.

LOOK AND FEEL

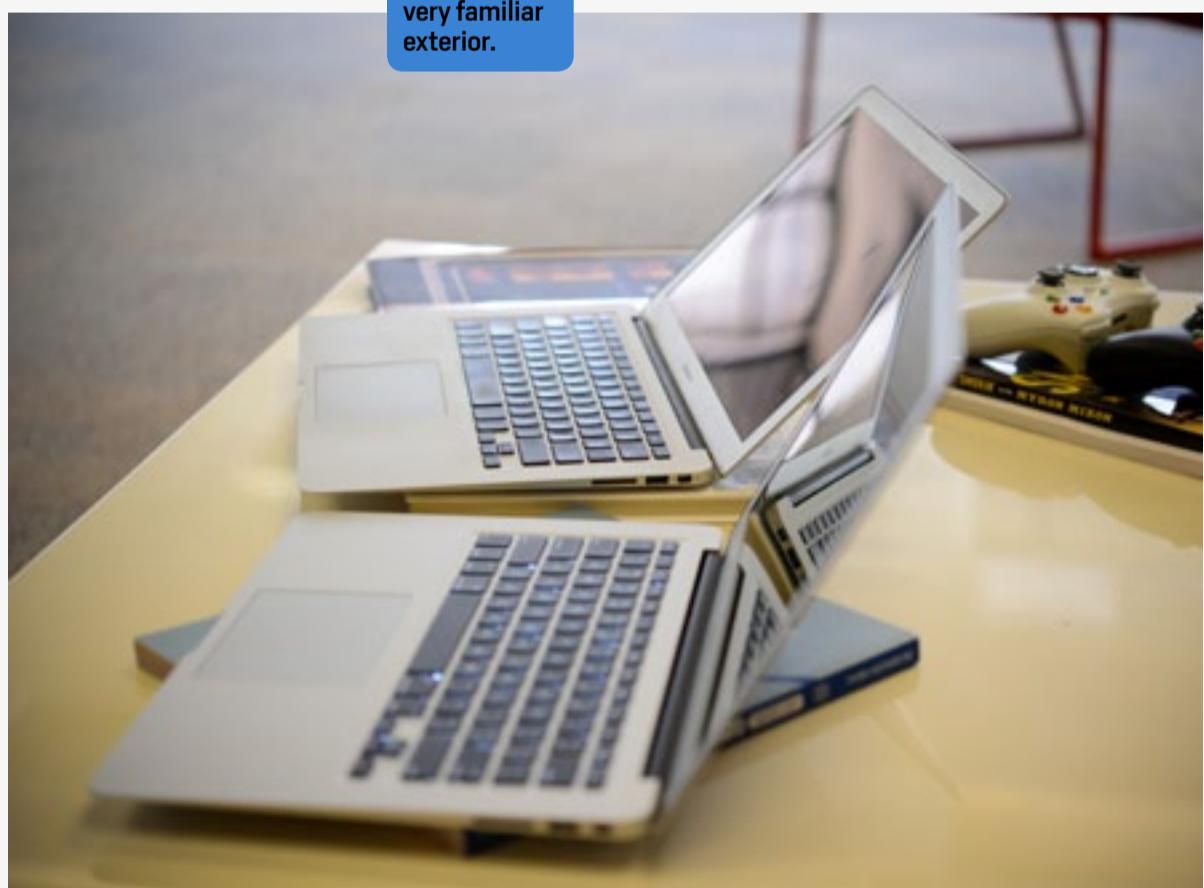
What once was a fresh and exciting design has now, it must be said, become rather familiar. That's in part because of the success of the MacBook Air — we see them popping open on trains and airplanes all the time these days — but largely this is thanks to Apple not significantly revamping the design for nearly three years, a period over which we've seen radical changes on the PC side of things. Is this the result of priorities being committed elsewhere? Or, is it simply a case of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it"? We'll let the reader decide on that front, and while we tend to lean toward the latter option, the net result is the same: we won't spend an awful lot of time describing this

now-familiar machine.

Is the unchanged design the result of priorities being committed elsewhere? Or, is it simply a case of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it"?

This 13-inch MacBook Air maintains its wedge-shaped profile, a maximum of 0.68 inch thick at the back tapering down to a 0.11-inch terminal edge at the front. It's 12.8 inches wide, 8.9 inches deep and weighs just a hair under three pounds (1.35 kg). These specs were nothing short of amazing a few years back, but today, devices like the Samsung Se-

This year's MacBook Air sports a very familiar exterior.



ries 9 and Sony VAIO Pro 13 manage to be even thinner and even lighter.

Though its thin-and-light crown may be long gone, the Air is still a very sleek device, the sort that may leave you peeking in your bag one more time before you leave home to make sure you didn't forget your laptop. It also retains its impressive overall feel, with a very stiff chassis that does not flex and a keyboard tray that can stand up to the most vigorous of typists. There's still just the one color option, the matte, raw-aluminum color that looks clean and lovely out of the box, but, as we've seen, can be scratch-prone.

Ports are exactly the same as last year. On the right, you get a USB 3.0 port flanked by Thunderbolt on one side and an SDXC card reader on the other. Move over to the left and you'll find the MagSafe 2 connector, a second USB 3.0 port and a 3.5mm headphone / mic jack. Look very closely next to that and you'll marvel at the one, single, solitary external difference compared to last year: a second hole in the side for the integrated microphone, intended for active noise cancellation.

And that's it. So, if you're a current



The keyboard and trackpad remain solid performers here.

Air user who packs a USB hub and Ethernet adapter wherever you go, that won't be changing this year. That said, with the new 802.11ac support, maybe you won't need that Ethernet adapter after all.

KEYBOARD AND TRACKPAD

Neither the keyboard nor the trackpad have changed this year, but that's a good thing. In 2011 the MacBook Air finally received backlit keys with what felt like a slightly springier feel than before, making an already great typing experience even better. That design is retained in 2013, leaving a keyboard that not only has great tactility, but also has a very broad and comfortable layout.

Also broad and comfortable is the glass trackpad, which, along with the keyboard, remains one of our favorites. The sensation of dragging a finger



across the matte glass is as good as ever and the responsiveness is perfect for executing all of the many and myriad gestures that OS X has on offer.

DISPLAY AND SOUND

It's no Retina, a fact that can be confirmed with a quick glance. Still, this remains a great-looking LCD, making the most of its 1,440 x 900 resolution. Viewing angles are as good as ever and brightness does not disappoint. Color reproduction is spot-on and the LED backlighting is both good for your battery and the environment.

The Air's built-in speakers are capable of getting impressively (and uncomfortably) loud if cranked all the way, so hearing a concall from across a room won't be an issue. Still, it's hardly an ideal machine for music playback, with flat, bass-free renditions of all your favorite music. It'll certainly do in a pinch, but you'll want to make use

We'll have to wait longer for a Retina-packing Air on our desk.



of that 3.5mm jack (or, indeed, a Bluetooth connection) to enable something with a bit more acoustic range.

PERFORMANCE AND BATTERY LIFE

As usual, we're testing the base-spec 13-inch MacBook Air, the one most consumers are likely to buy. For \$1,099 we get a 1.3GHz Intel Core i5 processor of the Haswell generation, paired with integrated Intel HD 5000 graphics. The graphics themselves are a nice bump up over the previous-generation machine, but the clock speed is a step down. Last year's base Air came with a 1.8GHz CPU, and as you can see in the table below, this machine does indeed test slightly slower.

But, there is one area where this new machine is significantly faster than before: I/O. This year's Air moves to PCIe storage internally, which means significantly faster speeds in theory. And in practice, as it turns out. The

BlackMagic benchmark showed us 433.4 MB/s for writes and 725.4 MB/s for reads, considerably quicker even than the current Retina MacBook Pro. That helps the boot-up time too. Last year was a speedy 18 seconds. This year? Cold boot to login screen occurs in just under 12.



Last year was a speedy 18 seconds. This year? Cold boot to login screen occurs in just under 12.

If that didn't impress you enough, there's one area where the performance has really gone off the charts, and that's battery life. Apple rates the 2013 edi-

tion of the MacBook Air for up to 10 hours of battery life playing video or 12 hours of wireless web surfing. Our standard rundown test, as it happens, also entails playing video and last year's machine managed just over six and a half hours before expiring. We were, then, skeptical that this new edition could manage nearly twice that longevity — but it actually did better. This year's Air survived 12 hours and 51 minutes on a charge. That's a stunning number

OS X BENCHMARKS	GEEKBENCH	XBENCH	BATTERY LIFE
13-INCH MACBOOK AIR (MID-2013, 1.3GHZ CORE i5, INTEL HD GRAPHICS 5000)	6,021	304	12:51
13-INCH MACBOOK PRO WITH RETINA DISPLAY (LATE 2012, 2.5GHZ CORE i5, INTEL HD GRAPHICS 4000)	6,812	378	6:07
13-INCH MACBOOK PRO (MID-2012, 2.5GHZ CORE i5, INTEL HD GRAPHICS 4000)	6,817	368	6:51
13-INCH MACBOOK AIR (MID-2012, 1.8GHZ CORE i5, INTEL HD GRAPHICS 4000)	6,195	321	6:34
13-INCH MACBOOK AIR (MID-2011, 1.7GHZ CORE i5-2557M, INTEL HD GRAPHICS 3000)	5,373	N/A	5:32
15-INCH MACBOOK PRO WITH RETINA DISPLAY (MID-2012, 2.6GHZ CORE i7)	11,591	486	7:49
15-INCH MACBOOK PRO WITH RETINA DISPLAY (MID-2012, 2.3GHZ CORE i7)	11,082	457	9:22
MACBOOK PRO (EARLY 2011, 2.2GHZ CORE i7-2720QM, RADEON HD 6750M / INTEL GRAPHICS 3000)	9,647	340.1 (RADEON) / 157.78 (INTEL)	7:27
MACBOOK PRO (EARLY 2010, 2.66GHZ CORE i7-620M, GEFORCE GT 330M)	5,395	228.22	5:18
13-INCH MACBOOK AIR (LATE 2010, 1.83GHZ CORE 2 DUO, GEFORCE 320M)	2,717	117.38	4:34



from a laptop this thin, achieved with WiFi enabled and without any external batteries.

We've not been able to test the higher-speed Core i7 version of this machine and, while we anticipate that will be slightly more thirsty, it's safe to say the new 13-inch MacBook Air truly is an all-day laptop. We've used it extensively off the charger, on coast-to-coast flights and in nature settings far away from the nearest power plug and, while you can certainly kill the battery quicker if you're doing things like editing photos or video, you'd have to be working very hard to deplete this cell in fewer than six hours.

CONFIGURATION OPTIONS

The base-spec 2013 13-inch MacBook Air starts at \$1,099, \$100 less than last year. But, as we've just seen, the lower-performance CPU must certainly be taken into consideration here. If you'd like to step up to a

Upgrades can tack on up to 8GB RAM and a 512GB SSD for storage.



Fully loaded, you're looking at \$1,849.

1.7GHz Core i7 processor, you're looking at a \$150 premium. Doubling the storage from the default 128GB to 256GB is \$200 and, if you want to go all the way up to 512GB, you'll pay another \$300. 4GB of RAM is standard, though you can get 8GB for \$100 more and, other than the usual bevy of accessories that Apple would love for you to tack on to your purchase (SuperDrive, Thunderbolt display, etc.) those are all the boxes you're able to tick. Fully loaded, you're looking at \$1,849.

Of course, you can save \$100 by going with the 11-inch MacBook Air. That machine starts at \$999 for the 128GB model (up from 64 before) and from there you're looking at the same price increments as on the 13-inch model: \$150 for more a better CPU, \$200 or \$500 for the two increased storage options and \$100 for more RAM. Predictably, then, a fully specced model also costs \$100 less: \$1,749.

THE COMPETITION

To say that the laptop space has shifted in the past 12 months since the 2012 MacBook Air shipped would be a gross understatement. PC makers have invented and reinvented their wares to stay relevant in this incredibly competitive (and shrinking) market, adding



touchscreens, removable keyboards, crazy convertible designs and lots of other features — some needed, some not.

Still, even if you strip away all the tricks, it's clear that the MacBook Air, with only its new Haswell CPU and faster storage, is facing far stiffer competition than ever before. And, that competition will only get better as more machines move up to Intel's latest and greatest. Of those that have already made the shift, the Sony VAIO Pro looks to be the most compelling. At 2.34 pounds, the 13-inch model is lighter than the Air and it's exactly the same 0.68-inch thickness. Promised battery life is 13 hours — but to get that you'll have to use an additional

sheet battery. It does cost a fair bit more, starting at \$1,249 for the 13-inch model, but for that you get a full 1080p IPS LCD. We'd guess that many potential Air buyers would spend another \$150 to get the same. (We certainly would.)

Another Haswell-having machine is the recently announced Dell XPS 12. We haven't had a chance to test out this year's iteration, but last year's model left us reasonably impressed and, at \$1,200 again with a 1080p display, it's even closer in price to the Air.

And then there's Samsung's Series 9. It was one of our favorite Ultrabooks of last year and remains a top contender, standing toe

The Air may not be the compelling purchase it once was.



to toe with the previous Air. But, with a presumed Haswell refresh not far off, we can't say we'd be seriously considering this model right now — unless you find it discounted well below its \$1,300 MSRP.

Finally, there's the sibling rivalry with Apple's own Retina MacBook Pro machines. Last year we were quite fond of both the 15-inch and 13-inch varieties and, indeed, both are still powerhouses. But, again, Haswell updates there can't be far away, and so it's hard to recommend either model now. That said, if you're not in a big rush, it wouldn't hurt to wait a month or three. With any luck, Pros with faster I/O and killer battery life are right around the corner.

WRAP-UP

So, is this a case of a great thing getting even greater, or an aged product getting the bare-minimum upgrade required to keep it relevant? The truth lies somewhere in between, but it goes without

saying that the MacBook Air isn't quite the straightforward "buy" that it has been in the past. While I/O performance and battery life definitely set it ahead of the crowd, and its overall design and keyboard / trackpad combo are as good as ever, that middling display resolution is evolving from an excusable omission to a proper handicap.

Still, it's hard to knock the Air for what it is: a very thin laptop with incredible battery life and good performance for a minimum price that puts it ahead of its competition. If you want a portable Mac with a real focus on portability and can live without a Retina display then we'd say this is still the machine to get. But, if you're not tied to the platform or are a stickler for pixel density, it might just be time to look elsewhere. ◊

Tim Stevens is Editor-in-chief at Engadget, a lifelong gamer, a wanna-be racer, and a born Vermonter.

BOTTOMLINE

**APPLE
MACBOOK
AIR [13-INCH,
MID-2013]
\$1099+**



PROS

- Phenomenal battery life
- Fast I/O from PCIe SSDs
- \$100 less than last year
- Great keyboard and trackpad

CONS

- Still no Retina display
- Base CPU performance lower than last year

BOTTOMLINE

The 2013 MacBook Air offers amazing battery life and disk I/O performance for an even more accessible price, but it sure could use a few more pixels in that display.



FINAL FANTASY XIV

BOOTH 1647

SQUARE ENIX

We take a look at
THE HISTORY OF E3, examine
the uphill climb facing the
Wii U, go **HANDS-ON** with
the latest tech straight from
the show floor and chat with
NINTENDO'S EIJI AONUMA

PHOTOGRAPH BY ZACH HONIG

THE HARDEST





Then There Were Three

Sony, Microsoft, Nintendo and the Evolution of the Electronic Entertainment Expo

By Sean Buckley

The ESA recently hosted the 18th annual Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles, a multimillion-dollar event that serves as a soapbox for industry leaders, game developers and peripheral manufacturers as well as a focal point for video game enthusiasts. The show is a driving force for the industry, dictating Christmas lists in early June and establishing what products will live, die and fade from the public mind. Retailers eye consumer reactions to help them finalize their holiday orders and fans devour coverage of the event as if it was manna from heaven. Since the show's 1995 launch, video games have grown





from a niche category to a central facet of modern entertainment — finding their own place in the music industry, our national museums and even organizations like the Boy Scouts of America. No other event celebrates and glorifies the industry so thoroughly.

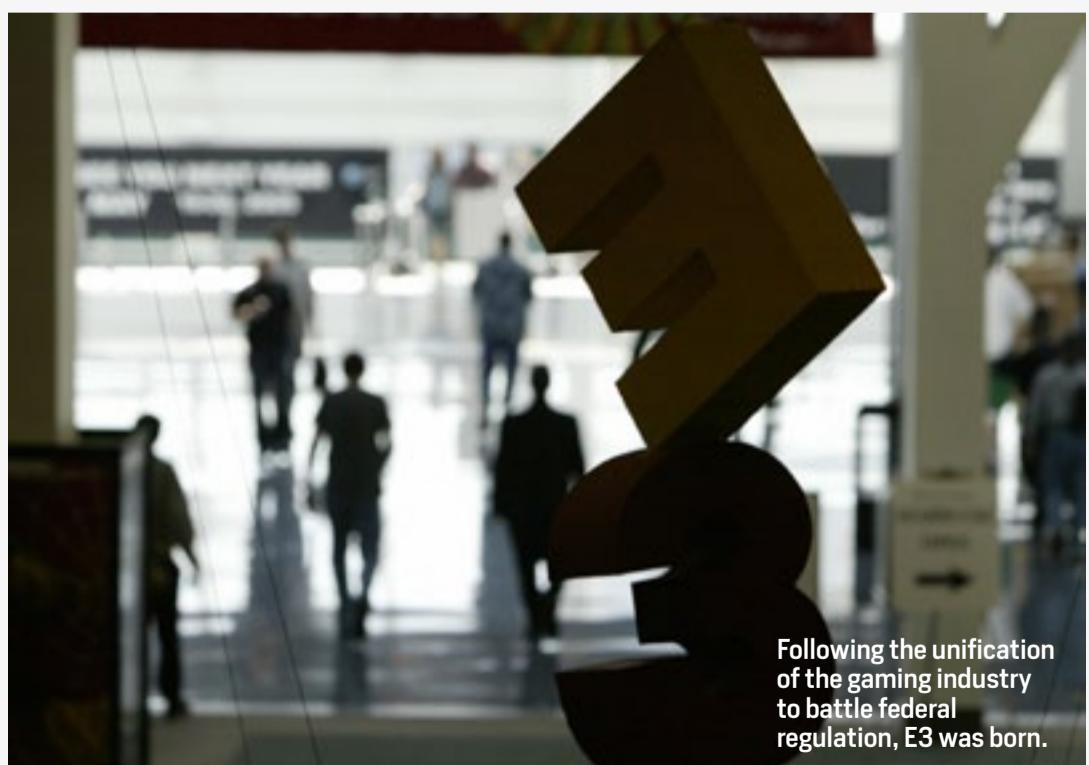
Yes, it's a trade show at heart — as well as the industry's best hype machine — but it's also a very prominent part of gaming fandom. Following the news, scrutinizing announcements and arguing over who "won" the show is almost an annual tradition. Amid all of the event's excitement, it's easy to forget its strange origins. The industry's biggest spectacle wasn't born from a rational need to create a unifying trade show, but instead from a federally imposed stalemate in the console wars of the 1990s.

MORTAL KOMBAT ON CAPITOL HILL

In late 1993, Acclaim released the home console version of the popular fighter, *Mortal Kombat*. Since its release in arcades a year prior, the title had become immensely popular — capitalizing on the popularity of *Street Fighter II* while simultaneously raising the stakes with digitized graphics (animations created from photographs) and comically gory violence. Naturally, the title was a hit,

selling millions of units between the toned-down Super Nintendo version of the game and the fully featured (and graphic) Sega Genesis cartridge. Unfortunately, that popularity also made it a target, eventually drawing the attention of Joseph Lieberman, then Democratic Senator of Connecticut. Startled by the game's graphic content, Lieberman investigated other mature titles of the era and became gravely concerned about the marketing of violent video games to children. The senator quickly organized a congressional hearing to address the issue, bringing the video game industry under heavy scrutiny. Unbeknownst to Lieberman, these actions would eventually set the stage for the industry's first dedicated trade show.

The hearings began in December 1993. A panel made up of industry executives, educators and child psychology experts accused games like *Mortal*



Following the unification of the gaming industry to battle federal regulation, E3 was born.



... If the industry couldn't establish its own standard for rating games, the government would.

Kombat and *Night Trap* of rewarding children for acts of simulated (and gruesome) violence. As the hearings continued, panelists accused the industry of promoting racism, sexism, violence and homophobia. To make matters worse, Nintendo and Sega attacked each other throughout much of the hearing, hoping to trap one another in a mire of federal regulation. Eventually, Lieberman issued an ultimatum in the form of the Video Game Ratings Act of 1994: if the industry couldn't establish its own standard for rating games, the government would.

It was a forced turning point for the industry. Companies that had spent years combating each other in the marketplace now had to either work together, or face the wrath of the federal government. In 1994,

executives from Sega, Nintendo, Atari, 3DO, Philips and Electronic Arts banded together to create a new trade organization: the Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA) — known today as the Entertainment Software Association (ESA). The group tapped Douglas Lowenstein, a Washington, D.C.-area consultant who had worked with Electronic Arts on an unrelated project, to head the IDSA as the organization's first president.

"One of the things that these companies realized was that the shield against criticism was informing consumers about what was in the product," Lowenstein said. "At the same time that they were looking to build a trade association, they brought on a consultant named Dr. Arthur Prober, who had done a lot of work in children's television. He developed what became the ESRB."

The newly formed Entertainment Software Rating Board placated Congress,

temporarily silencing the outcry over violent video games.



COURTESY OF PHILIP PALERMO

CONCEIVING A TRADE SHOW

Without having to worry about the threat of federal regulation, the newly unified games industry was free to use the IDSA to focus on common is-





"He was on the phone for me, and he said, 'Pat? It's Gary. You win. We're done,' and hung up," Ferrell remembers, laughing. "That was the whole conversation!"

sues. It didn't take long before someone brought up the Consumer Electronics Show. CES had been the event of choice for the video game industry for several years, but many companies simply didn't feel at home at the venue.

"There was a CES in Vegas where the video game industry was relegated to temporary tents out in the parking lot," Andy Eddy, editor-in-chief of @Gamer magazine, remembered. "It was really windy and rainy. Some people had rain dripping on their monitors during exhibiting hours." Eddy explained that the gaming industry was

pouring money into the show, and felt spurned by being relegated to leaky, off-site housing.

"It sort of felt like we were at the back of the bus."

After a meeting between video game executives and CES organizers (the Consumer Electronics Association, or CEA) failed to resolve the industry's issues, companies started looking for alternatives. Pat Ferrell, creator of *GamePro* magazine, cooked up an idea for a trade show built specifically for the game industry. He began to reach out for support.

"I started calling guys like Bill White (Sega) and I talked to Bing Gordon (Electronic Arts)," Ferrell told us. "They told me, 'If you can show us you can throw this thing, we'll jump in.'" That wasn't going to be a problem, Ferrell said — his outfit was a wholly owned subsidiary of International Data

Group (IDG), which had its own exhibition management firm, IDG World Expo. "We were already doing shows like MacWorld."

It was decided that the expo needed ties to the industry's new trade group, and Ferrell struck a deal with the IDSA, proposing an industry-specific alternative





to CES: the Electronic Entertainment Expo. "At the same time," Lowenstein recalled, "CES put together a proposal to create kind of a dedicated video game segment of their Chicago show."

Ferrell knew there was only room for one gaming trade show, and needed a way to force companies to pick a side. "I laid my dates on top of theirs," he told us. "Now the companies kind of had to decide what horse they were going to bet on."

With two options on the table, the IDSA and the industry's leading firms had to come to a decision. Sega immediately backed the proposal for a new show, while Nintendo erred on the

side of caution, defending CES. "Nintendo had a long, very successful relationship with CES," Lowenstein explained.

"It wasn't so much that they had any issues; it was more, you know, if it ain't broke, don't fix it."

The IDSA eventually voted on the issue, with the new show winning the motion with a vote of 7-2. Still, Nintendo and Microsoft stubbornly refused to join the project. "This war continued for three or four months," Ferrell told us. Eventually, someone had to blink, and Ferrell received a call from the CEA's Gary Shapiro. "He was on

The entrance to the 2005 E3 at the Los Angeles Convention Center.





the phone for me, and he said, ‘Pat? It’s Gary. You win. We’re done,’ and hung up,” Ferrell remembers, laughing. “That was the whole conversation!”

Within hours, Ferrell was on the phone with Microsoft and Nintendo, making plans to include the two companies in E3. With all other options eliminated, the firms reluctantly agreed to join the show. Smaller companies joined in too, now that all of the major gaming outfits were on board. According to Eddy, “Once Nintendo bought in, everybody else bought in.” The industry was finally ready to host its own event.

THE EARLY YEARS

On May 11th, 1995, the inaugural Electronic Entertainment Expo opened its doors. Despite having filled out all available space in the Los Angeles Convention Center, Lowenstein was nervous. “We didn’t know if anybody was going to show up!” he said. Lowenstein described the act of building a new trade show as virgin territory. The IDSA simply didn’t know if the show was going to be a success, but it didn’t take long to get an answer.

“Literally the first day of the first show, I remember walking around and, you know, it was the best thing I’d ever seen,” he told us, recall-

ing the relief of seeing the halls crowded with attendees, and lines snaking away from registration. “Normally you never want to see that, right? You never want people waiting on line for an hour. People were pouring in; it was a sense of ‘we’ve got something here.’”

The LA Convention Center’s front-facing South Hall was completely booked by the time Nintendo chose to join E3, costing the company a premium location. Still, Nintendo made the most of it, filling out nearly a fourth of the convention center’s 210,685-square-foot West Hall and attracting plenty of traffic for its efforts. Sega’s and Sony’s booths were huge too, collectively representing about a third of the South Hall’s enormous 346,890-square-foot show floor. Their lavish displays set a precedent that would continue for years to come, and would eventually cause the entire show to buckle. In the meantime, the console war of

Nintendo's booth at the very first E3 in 1995.





Nintendo Land makes a splash at the 2012 E3 following the game's launch at Nintendo's keynote event.

the era raged on — the major manufacturers may have banded together to form the IDSA and create E3, but all bets were off when it came to the show floor. Sega made the first volley, revealing its previously announced Saturn launch date to be a farce: rather than releasing the new console in September, as planned, the 32-bit machine hit retailers on the *first day* of the show. Sony, not to be outdone, fired back with the original PlayStation's launch price: \$299, a full \$100 cheaper

The IDSA simply didn't know if the show was going to be a success, but it didn't take long to get an answer.

WILLIUSPIELE.COM/Flickr

than the suddenly available Saturn. Nintendo demoed the Virtual Boy for the first time, too — but that didn't work out in the long run.

With over 40,000 attendees in its first year, the show was clearly a success, and the IDSA knew it had something big on its hands. Under the existing agreement, IDG had control of the E3 name and its intellectual rights. Lowenstein said the trade association quickly renegotiated those terms.

"We went to them and said, 'Look, we want to own the show. We're happy to have you put the show on, but we're gonna own it,'" he said. "So we negotiated a different deal, which made the then IDSA the owner of E3 and its intellectual property. Eventually, we





owned it all and we entered into a vendor relationship. We hired IDG World Expo to actually put on the show. They received a management fee for doing that, and we pocketed the net profit after management fees and expenses."

News of the show's success spread through the industry, and soon companies were knocking on the IDSA's door.

"When we went to year two, demand for space skyrocketed," Lowenstein said. "We not only had the traditional game companies, but we had educational software companies; we had peripheral manufacturers."

It was the mid-'90s, and the "edutainment" industry was still trying to establish itself with consumers. Mainstream news made some fuss over the CD-ROM titles that debuted at the 1996 show, including interactive encyclopedia software and digital history and art collections. Today, Lowenstein laughs at the memory of the category.

"I used to joke with people about it," he said. "They'd ask me why the market hadn't taken off, and I would say, 'When was the last time a kid went up to mom and dad and said, 'I want *Math Blasters* for my birthday'?' E3's future was in the gaming enthusiast's corner.

That same year, Sony knocked \$100 off of the price of its PlayStation, prompting a reactionary price cut from Sega. Jeff Green, former journalist and current director of editorial and social media at PopCap, remembers the Nintendo 64 as the star of 1996.

"Back then there was a sort of supe-

riority and elitism about the PC gaming crowd that I was a part of, you know — looking down on all the consoles,"

Green said. "Then the N64 came along, and really, that was kind of our first look at next-gen 3D graphics. I think many of us were genuinely blown away ... that felt like the future at the time."

In 1997, the show started a quick two-year stint in Atlanta, Ga. Green remembers that too, but not very fondly.

"That was crazy. It was super-freaking hot," he recalled, laughing. "I know that was when a bunch of shooters got shown for the first time on the PC, like *Half-Life*, *Unreal* — those games. Mostly though, I remember the heat."

With the major console announcements out of the way, the show was more focused on software. *Duke Nukem Forever* began its laughable tradition of endless delays, and future hits rolled out across the show: *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Resident Evil 2*, *Metal Gear Solid* and more. E3 left Atlanta after the following year, but not before Sega announced the Dreamcast, its final attempt at winning the hardware race. The new con-

One Time article of the era passively shamed E3 attendees enjoying a demonstration of *Quake III*, asserting that it was "as if Columbine had never happened."





sole's reveal was the most arresting announcement of the show, but it was closely tailed by *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*.

Sony didn't wait until the next Electronic Entertainment Expo to respond to the Sega Dreamcast. In March 1999, the company officially announced the PlayStation 2, immediately shifting the conversation into Sony's realm. Sega pushed back by bringing a strong launch lineup to E3 that summer, which had since returned to its original venue. It was the dawn of a new console cycle, but the show was tainted in the wake of the Columbine high school massacre. Reacting to the news that the shoot-

ers were avid fans of *Doom*, the media once again focused its attention on violence in video games, descending upon the show to uncover the culture behind "gore games."

One Time article of the era passively shamed E3 attendees enjoying a demonstration of *Quake III*, asserting that it was "as if Columbine had never happened." The author, David S. Jackson, went on to describe how companies avoided addressing the issue. To be fair, some of them were.

"A lot of game companies put their shooters and their violent games be-



AP PHOTO/RENE MACURA

Michael Jackson gets his game on amongst Sony execs at the inaugural 1995 E3 event.





hind closed doors,” Green recalled. “That’s a common practice anyway, but games that were supposed to be on the show floor were taken off because of the negative press around the violence.”

Lowenstein remembered the period too, and explained that he tried to be optimistic that the media would treat these situations differently in the future.

“It was a real challenging period, but at the same time, we knew that eventually there would just be an organic shift,” Lowenstein said. “I spoke once at E3 and said, ‘In our lifetime we’re going to have a president of the United States that grew up playing *Grand Theft Auto*.’ It’s true, we already have people in Congress that grew up playing *Grand Theft Auto*.”

ESTABLISHING A NEW GENERATION

The sensational press eventually died down, and the industry rode out of 1999 with strong sales. By the time the 2000 show arrived, Sega had sold over 2 million Dreamcasts and *PC World* reported that Nintendo was closing in on its 100 millionth Game Boy. Both *Halo* and the Xbox moonlit the show, but not as we now know them — Microsoft teased its upcoming console with a tech demo (the final hardware would even-

As the gaming industry waged war on the E3 show floor, the IDSA found itself doing battle with the media.

tually be revealed at CES 2001), and *Halo* hadn’t yet made the jump to consoles. The show’s most hyped announcements centered on the rivalry between Sega and Sony, with each company exhibiting major titles for the Dreamcast and PlayStation 2, respectively. Despite beating the PlayStation 2 to market, Sega’s Dreamcast failed to resonate with consumers — by 2001, it had resigned itself to its fate as a software company, demonstrating titles for both the Xbox and the newly announced Nintendo GameCube. Nintendo also showed off the Game Boy Advance, and early demos of what would eventually become *Metroid Fusion*.

Soon, Sega faded from the gaming community’s collective consciousness, isolating the three companies that rule the roost of the console industry today: Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo. For the next four years, their devices were the stars of E3, seeing landmark releases for each platform as the show trudged forward. Two *Zelda* games made their way to the GameCube between 2002 and 2004, and the massively popular *Halo* franchise received its first sequel. Sony first announced the PSP in 2003, prompting Nintendo to respond with the release of the original DS the following year.

As the gaming industry waged war on the E3 show floor, the IDSA found itself doing battle with the media. “Our people would call reporters and leave





Gamers queue up for entry at E3's 10th annual event in 2004.

a message and say, ‘We’re with the Interactive Digital Software Association,’ and nobody would ever know who they were,” Lowenstein told us, explaining that the organization’s name simply wasn’t recognizable. “It was a mouthful and people got the acronym all wrong. Half the time people called us the ISDA.” Even board members had a tendency to flub the moniker, Lowenstein said, and the organization eventually rebranded itself as the Entertainment Software Association, or ESA.

As games rolled out over the next few years, Microsoft focused on its next hardware release — beating the competition to the punch. When the Xbox 360 hit the market in late 2005, Sony and Nintendo were just teasing their next-

generation hardware. However, Japan’s giants got a chance to fight back at E3 2006. Sony outfitted a two-story booth with theaters showcasing games from the PlayStation 3’s launch lineup, and Nintendo’s Wii sparked the imagination of the community.

“It just demoed so well at that E3,” Green told us. “This was at a time when people were still making fun of the name, and the whole thing seemed like a gimmick. We’re definitely all used to it now, and most of us have nunchucks collecting dust in the closet or whatever, but at the time, at that show, it was so exciting to play.” Nintendo’s lavish booth piped digital product demonstrators in via large LCD screens, spooking guests who didn’t notice the two-way



camera that allowed the personalities to see and even talk with them. The competition had equally impressive presentations, featuring multiple levels, large screens and enormous spaces. For attendees, the structures were fantastic and grand, but exhibitors were feeling the strain of that grandeur.



SANTA MONICA

"By 2006, the show was huge," Lowenstein explained. Each year, he'd sit down with the major exhibitors to get a bead on how the show was going, and as the show matured, a trend developed. "I'd go and sit in these little meeting rooms with Kaz Hirai of Sony, you know, or Howard Lincoln or whoever from Nintendo or Larry Probst from EA, and we'd sit down and I'd say, 'How's the show going?' and invariably at some point, a lot of them would say, 'This is ridiculous. This is crazy. We're spending so much money here, we can't

justify this anymore.'"

E3, they told Lowenstein, was just getting too expensive. "Companies spent literally \$5 million and \$10 million building some of these booths," he said. In 2006, the situation came to a head. The ESA (formerly the IDSA, remember?) held its

annual post-show meeting, and heard from a number of prominent companies that they would not be returning to the show in 2007. Lowenstein described these parties as E3's "anchor tenants," the companies whose presence drew not only the crowds, but other exhibitors as well. "There was

more than one," he hinted to us, not so subtly. "More than two. If big companies started pulling out and they gave everybody else cover to pull out, the show would go from huge to nothing literally overnight."

The ESA had to either find an alternative, or risk losing the show altogether. The organization decided that E3 would become an invite-only media summit rather than a large expo, and moved the event down the road to Santa Monica, Calif.

"It went from being a 60,000-attendee show to being a 5,000-person media

"The only thing that was worse than having a giant E3 was having a tiny E3," Green concluded.

showcase," Eddy recalled. "It was basically a bunch of conference rooms in hotels." Attendees weren't enthusiastic about the new format. Announcements still came in 2007, but *BioShock*, *Halo Wars*, *LittleBigPlanet* and the show's other announcements seemed less exciting for the lack of spectacle.

"It was scaled so far back that it had

the effect of making it look insignificant." Green told us. "What I realized at the time was that part of the importance of E3 was just being big — a celebration of gaming itself and a declaration of how big an industry it is, how popular it is. It sort of needed the yearly chance to crow about itself — it makes everybody feel better, despite it being a complete pain in the ass." Scaling back the show may have been the right move at the time, but the disdain for the new format seemed to be universal. "The only thing that was worse

CHRIS WEEKS/WIREIMAGE

Chewbacca presents the *Star Wars* PSP to Sony Computer Entertainment CEO Jack Tretton at the E3 media event in 2007.





than having a giant E3 was having a tiny E3," Green concluded.

The show's smaller format persisted for one more year, just long enough for the ESA to change its mind. Lowenstein had left the organization by that point, but feels a return to form was a wise decision. "I wouldn't have changed the show," he told us. "It worked great for us, and I think it worked great for the industry back then. I think that's one of the reasons it sort of came back."

In 2009, E3 returned to the LA Convention Center and opened attendance to a wide audience once again. Not everything was the same, however — the ESA placed some limitations on the show, capping attendance at 45,000 and imposing other restrictions in hopes of managing both crowds and cost. Even so, the show was mostly back to old form.

MODERN DAY

Starting in 2009, Microsoft and Sony gunned for the motion control market by introducing Kinect (known as Project Natal at the time) and the PlayStation Move, respectively. The next year, Nintendo unveiled its quirky 3DS handheld, and Sony eventually followed by announcing the comparatively powerful PlayStation Vita in 2011. E3 once again became a spectacle of gaming hype, fea-

turing the usual deluge of major game announcements and fantastic floor demonstrations. As Sony and Microsoft tinkered with their next-generation hardware, Nintendo charged ahead with the Wii U, announcing, redesigning and hyping the console over several years.

Although 2013's event was still a reasonable success, trumpeting the launch of Sony's and Microsoft's upcoming next-gen hardware, the firms approached the event a little differently than normal.

"One way that a lot of companies have been dealing with the fact that E3 is so huge and impossible to move around, is of course, the way they're all doing these pre-E3 events now," noted Green, referencing Sony's and Microsoft's respective PlayStation 4 and Xbox One events. Both companies hosted their normal E3 pressers too, but the early peeks allowed the firms to offload some of the major news ahead of the show, dodging the noise these announcements would normally compete with. Nintendo's approach was even more unprecedented — by canceling its own large-scale press conference, and speaking to its fans personally via its Nintendo Direct livestreams, Mario's team has all but withdrawn itself from

One of these moves would have been insignificant on its own, but the fact that all three major players broke away from the standard E3 announcement format could affect the show's entire atmosphere moving forward.





the contest to “win” E3.

One of these moves would have been insignificant on its own, but the fact that all three major players broke away from the standard E3 announcement format could affect the show’s entire atmosphere moving forward. By hosting their own events to announce the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One, Sony and Microsoft softened the blow of their biggest announcements ahead of E3 — creating the opportunity to make software the star during a hardware launch year. Of course, the new consoles were still major news, but since they were *already old news*, there was less to outshine game announcements that might otherwise have been overlooked. A subtle difference, but an important one, considering that games sell hardware — not the other way around.

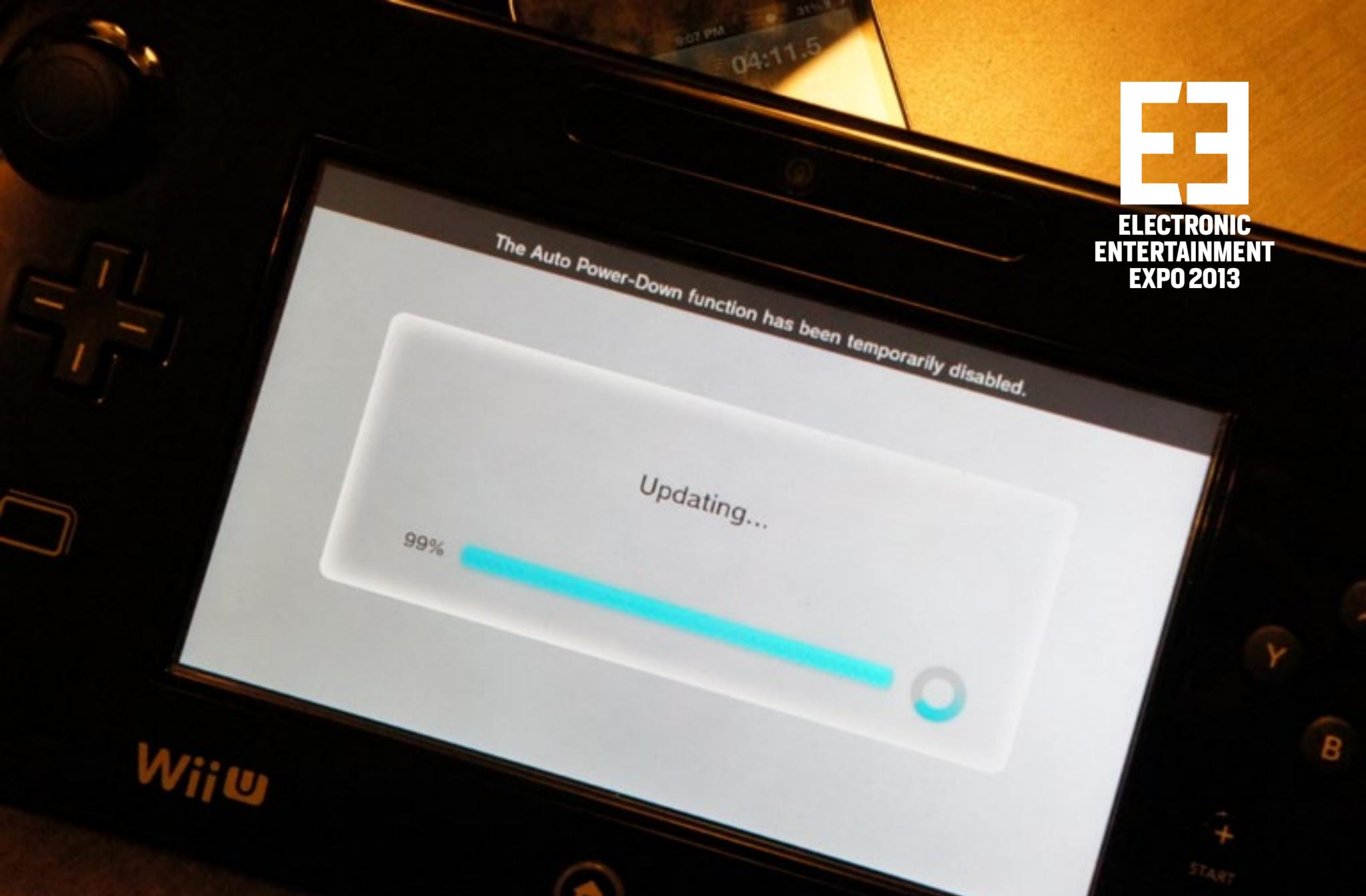


This change in format might even lead to E3’s next evolution: a more streamlined show with fewer major announcements. It’s a trend we’re already seeing in other sectors of the consumer electronics space — CES 2013 was ruled by smaller companies, with firms like Microsoft skipping out almost entirely. Companies are withholding announcements from these large venues in order to exhibit them in less noisy environments, be that a private event or just a more focused trade show like Mobile World Congress or IFA. As a result, these larger shows are getting smaller, or at least less extravagant.

It’s all too easy to simply think of E3 as this event that takes over the gaming media for a week every summer, but it’s more than that. Its creation is a symbol of the industry’s maturity, one of its first major steps to differentiate itself from the greater category of consumer electronics and software. At the same time, it’s also a symbol of war — an extravagant battleground for the major players of the video game space and the subject of a thousand heated debates among enthusiasts. In a way, it’s both a unifying and dividing force, and a large part of the culture that fuels the industry. D

Sean a lifelong gamer, a comic-book nerd, and an Eagle Boy Scout. He also writes for Engadget. What else is there to know?





The Plight of Nintendo's Wii U

The Wii U faces a daunting task as the next-gen surges onto shelves this fall

By Ben Gilbert

Nintendo's Wii U launched at retail nearly seven months ago to a lukewarm reception from critics. An even more tepid response from consumers followed, with week-one sales trailing behind those of its predecessor. A massive day-one patch, missing functionality (Nintendo TVii, anyone?) and an ever-expanding launch window for games, some of which still aren't available (*Pikmin 3*, anyone?) are just a few of the many issues that overwhelmed the discussion last November. Company head Satoru Iwata even publicly apologized.

In the past seven months, things have only gotten



worse, with slumping sales, next-gen competition and a lack of Wii U-centric games on the horizon.

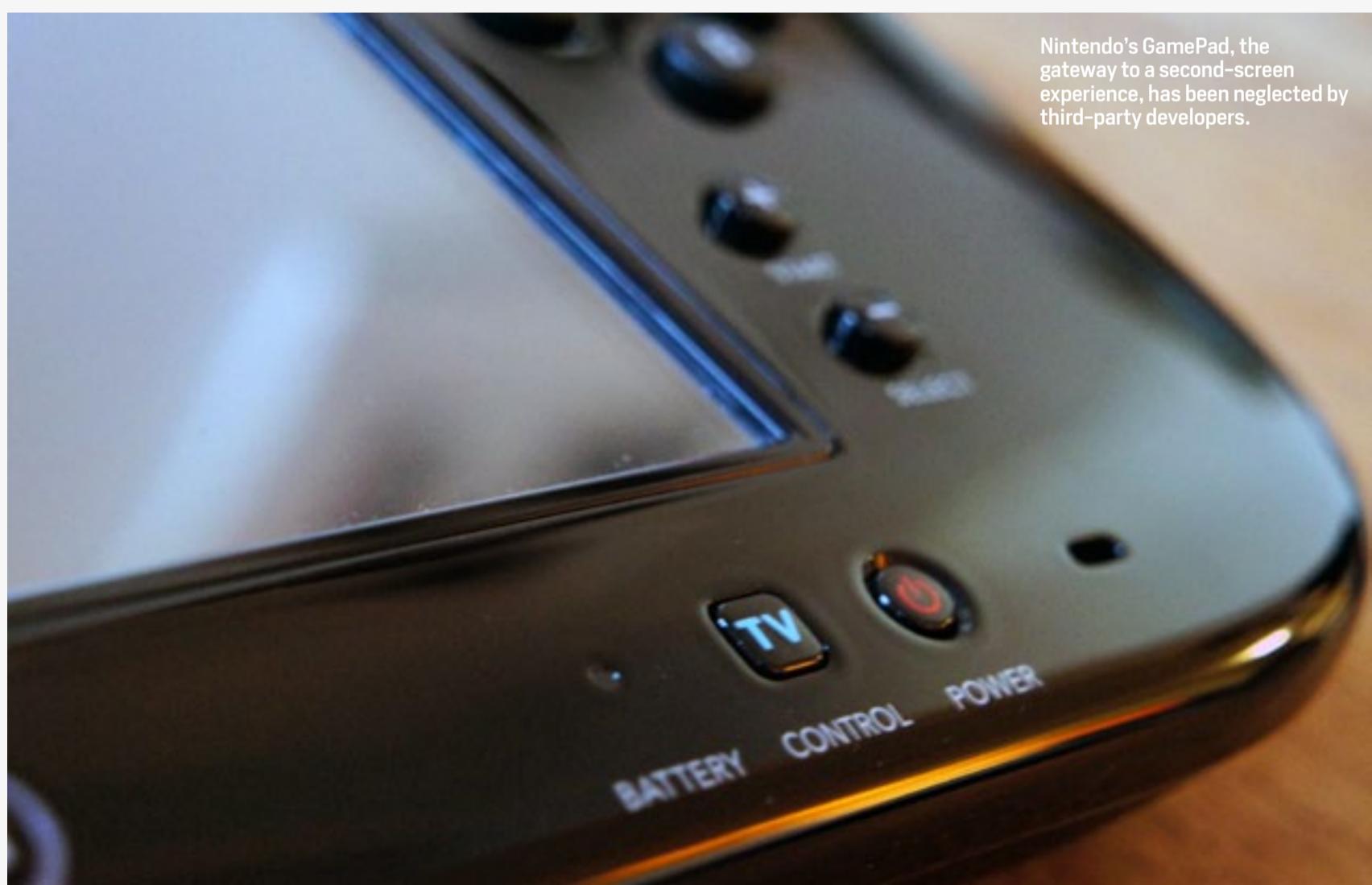
With E3 2013 this week — where Nintendo *usually* has a big press conference and didn't this year — we're revisiting the Wii U for an update, seven months out. We're not delving back into how the hardware works (surprise, it's identical to last year!) so much as looking at the console's early promise in contrast with its current predicament.

THE PROMISE AND THE PREDICAMENT

Nintendo's Wii U remains an intriguing game console. The second-screen concept, while a novelty, opened the door to some of 2012's most unique gaming experiences. Ubisoft's *ZombiU* utilized the Wii U's controller in thrilling ways, forcing players to stare down at the GamePad to rummage for supplies while the undead

citizens of London approached from all sides on the big screen. And Nintendo, of course, had first-party games to exemplify the content it wanted developers to create, with *Nintendo Land* and *New Super Mario Bros. U* acting as sterling examples.

Outside of those early titles and a scant few since (*Madden*, *Lego City Undercover*, *Batman: Arkham City*, etc.), the GamePad has fallen into what Food Network's Alton Brown would call a "unitasker" — a device with one use, which in this case is to play games as a controller. Many games allow off-screen play on the GamePad, but that's the extent to which its unique aspects are exploited; a notable plus for sure, but less interesting by a long shot than the promise of gameplay-specific uses like



Nintendo's GamePad, the gateway to a second-screen experience, has been neglected by third-party developers.



the aforementioned ZombiU scenario.

So, where are those experiences? And why aren't developers making them?

THE SHIPPING GAME

Sales of the Wii U are well below expectations at just 3.45 million units shipped as of March 31, and monthly sales aren't expected to improve until this fall as customers head into stores ahead of the holidays. Just one month before the Wii U's launch, Nintendo expected the console to have moved 5.5 million units by that March date; the company re-adjusted that expectation to 4 million units later, and then fell short of that goal as well. Those numbers have dire implications for the console's third-party development support — the EAs and Activisions of the world are less likely to invest in Wii U versions of their multiplatform games if there aren't enough people with Wii U's

buying them.

Few major third-party exclusives loom in the distance. *Bayonetta 2* and *The Wonderful 101*, both from Platinum Games, are on the way, as is a new *Sonic* game from Sega. Ubisoft is continuing support with versions of *Rayman Legends*, *Assassin's Creed IV Black Flag*, *Splinter Cell: Blacklist* and *Watch Dogs* heading to Wii U. Disney has *Disney Infinity* and Warner Bros. has *Scribblenauts Unmasked* and *Batman: Arkham Origins*. That's 10 games in total — not too shabby! — but only three of those 10 are exclusive to the Wii U.

Consoles do have fewer third-party exclusives these days. But in the case of the Wii U, the development focus that comes with exclusivity really matters. Few multiplatform third-party games make use of the Wii U's GamePad in any way beyond acting as a mirrored second screen, reflecting direct ports of Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 versions.

Last year's *Assassin's Creed III* used the Wii U GamePad as an in-game map (as well as a second screen for playing the game), which set a precedent we expect to be repeated: little-to-no utilization of the Wii U's unique controller in multiplatform third-party games. At least nothing beyond nominal additions.

That's to say nothing of technical chops — games like Assas-





sin's *Creed IV* and *Watch Dogs* straddle the current console generation and the next, with many considering the next-gen versions the best option based on looks alone. As Microsoft's and Sony's next boxes are still unreleased, developers are creating 360 and PS3 versions (making a Wii U version relatively easy to produce given its similar capabilities). By the 2014 holiday season, however, fewer and fewer game developers will have the incentive to keep spending resources on lower-res, less-capable versions of next-gen games. What will multiplatform third-party support — not to mention exclusive third-party support — look like for the Wii U when gamers move en masse to the next generation? The same minigame-laden hellscape gamers experienced with the Wii?

'WHAT'S A WII U?'

Of course, Nintendo's no stranger to being the odd man out. The Nintendo Wii and DS were less powerful than their competition and employed unique methods for player interaction. But where the DS found its audience with kids and the Wii attracted non-gamers with accessibility, the mainstream folks who initially embraced its predecessor thought the Wii U was little more than another accessory. This was such an issue, in fact, that Nintendo issued a message to Wii users explaining the difference in grueling detail:

"Wii U is the all-new home console from Nintendo. It's not just an upgrade — it's

an entirely new system that will change the way you and your family experience games and entertainment.

The second screen on the included Wii U GamePad controller enables never-before-seen ways to play games and enjoy TV. And for the first time ever, you can see Mario and your favorite Nintendo franchises in glorious HD."

The Wii U's GamePad is about as far from the Wii's basic controller as Nintendo could go, and with that complexity comes inaccessibility. In so many words, *Wii Sports* is immediately understood by anyone watching. That same statement can't be applied to *Nintendo Land*, or even the latest *Mario* game. Gone are the days of charming Japanese men invading American homes, Wiimote in-hand, easily explaining their intent through gameplay.

The "hardcore" folks who've been following the Wii U story — from Project Cafe, to the console's big unveiling at E3 2011, to its launch last holiday season — understand the controller, and they understand the console. They're the ones buying Virtual Console games for \$0.30 during Nintendo's "Trial Campaign" promotion and the ones watching Nintendo Direct. They're the ones who dropped \$350 for the Deluxe version of the console and the ones to whom Nintendo claims it's catering. And they're the ones who have little to look forward to in the Wii U's future.





Reggie Fils-Aime, president and COO for Nintendo of America introduces the Wii U at Nintendo's 2012 keynote at E3.

A GOOD ARGUMENT IS HARD TO FIND

When we reviewed the Wii U last November, we suggested readers not buy the console "just yet," due to a variety of "major missteps and half-baked ideas." Those statements, sadly, remain true today. Despite one firmware update aimed at fixing the console's speed, switching between applications (even one as simple as System Settings) is a time-consuming chore. As we stated last year in our review, the Friends List / Miiverse confusion regarding friend requests is still... confusing. There is still no standard for games and other software utilizing

the console's GamePad for off-screen play. But worst of all, third-party software support has all but disappeared, which means early adopters have little to look forward to outside of first-party Nintendo games.

With Microsoft's Xbox One and Sony's PlayStation 4 arriving this holiday — both of which offer far more powerful hardware and many of the multi-platform games found on Wii U — the argument for Nintendo's console is less powerful than ever. □

Ben Gilbert is a Senior Associate Editor at Engadget, where he tends to write about video games.





Hands-On: E3 2013

Impressions of next-gen
consoles, VR gadgets and more
from LA's annual geek-centric
summer shindig

PHOTOGRAPH BY WILL LIPMAN





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PlayStation 4 DualShock 4 & Game Demo



Just after the show floor opened, we got our first official hands-on with Sony's brand-new PlayStation 4 — unveiled the night before at E3 2013. Though we got to put our hands on the new DualShock 4 already, we were finally able to play some games, including *DriveClub*. At the start, the game took a picture of us using the Eye and it wasn't the highest quality. It's a bit of a gimmick, but neat nonetheless.

More importantly, when we actually played the game, the DualShock 4 felt great. It's light, responsive and comfortable — the new thumbsticks with convex tops cradle your thumbs, and the triggers easily hold your pointer fingers. As for the face buttons, things are nigh identical with previous DualShock iterations. The standard ex / triangle / circle / square combo remains, and looks just about the same as on the DualShock 3. Though the touchpad didn't have any in-game effect in *DriveClub*, the pad is easily clickable and not too far from your thumbs to quickly jump from face buttons to it.

PRICE: \$399

AVAILABILITY: LATE 2013

THE BREAKDOWN: DUALSHOCK 4 IS QUITE THE COMFORTABLE CONTROLLER AND THE EYE SPORTS ACCURATE IN-GAME TRACKING.

The next game we got to check out wasn't so much a game as it was a tech demo, known as *The Playroom* (a working title). It uses the DualShock 4 and Eye in a variety of very interesting ways. While the Eye tracks your controller via the light bar, you're able to flick up on the capacitive touchpad (which is very, very sensitive) and activate a menu to try out a variety of demos. The first one we checked out was "Play with Asobi," which has a little floating orb (a lot like *Portal 2*'s Wheatley) floating around and interacting via the PS4 Eye.

The Eye's light bar-tracking is very impressive, and allows for some fun stuff: rubbing the trackpad brings out Asobi, like a genie's lamp. Another neat aspect of *The Playroom* is how it works with connected devices. Using an Xperia Tablet Z, we could draw various items and throw them into the world (it employs the PlayStation mobile app, so we could've used any tablet). Not only do the items show up on screen, but they're also implemented in reality (virtually) on screen as the Eye captures us in front of it (the various demos in the game are all overlaid on the real world via video capture). — Ben Gilbert





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PlayStation 4 Gaming Roundup

Forget streaming applications, share buttons and chip architecture — the success of the next-gen video game consoles will be dictated largely by software. Games sell the system, and we couldn't help dropping by Sony's E3 booth to see what the PlayStation 4 is promising its early adopters. Read on for a quick look at a pair of titles that the console will offer during its launch window.

PRICE: TBD

AVAILABILITY: PS4 LAUNCH WINDOW

THE BREAKDOWN: THE DUALSHOCK 4'S TOUCHPAD GESTURES GO TO BATTLE AND THE EYE HITS THE TRACK.

KILLZONE: SHADOW FALL

Wondering how next-gen PlayStation games are going to make use of the DualShock 4's tiny touchpad? *Killzone: Shadow Fall* is one answer. The series' latest iteration uses the touch surface as a quick-key shortcut for accessing special abilities. Swiping to the right, for instance, enables a futuristic zipline tool for stealthily dropping into new locations — reversing

the gesture equips an energy shield and swiping up produced a drone. It's



a simple introduction to touch gaming on a traditional controller, but it's intuitive, simple and effective. Sony told us that these touch-access tools enable players to be a bit more tactical and stealthy than they could in the series' previous games, but we still saw plenty of action in our short demo. The PS4-exclusive title wasn't hard to look at either, and flirted with the kind of visuals usually reserved for PC gaming.



DRIVECLUB

Racing fan with a PS4 pre-order? You're looking for *DriveClub* — *Gran Turismo 6* is hanging back with the previous generation and as a result, the *GT* series doesn't use the new PlayStation 4's Eye. As *DriveClub* loaded up, it snapped a quick picture of us — but the image came out pretty blue. It probably had more to do with the dark lights in the Sony booth than the PlayStation Eye, but it definitely wasn't a great likeness. After a few rounds around the track, we adjusted to the game's semi-realistic handling. The game may not be a completely satisfying replacement for fans looking for a next-gen *Gran Turismo* game, but it'll do in a pinch.

— Sean Buckley





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Xbox One Gaming Roundup

It's a black set-top box. It's a media streamer. It's dependent on an internet connection. It's a living room hub. It wants to be your everything. But really, the Xbox One (or any new, next-gen console for that matter) is nothing without launch games. To get a real sense of that lean-in experience on the Xbox One, we spent some time in Microsoft's (very green) E3 booth playing the various available demos.

PRICE: TBD

AVAILABILITY: VARIES

THE BREAKDOWN: A HANDFUL OF TITLES SHOW OFF THE ONE'S GAMEPLAY CHOPS FROM STREET RACING TO ANCIENT ROME.

FORZA MOTORSPORT 5

The Microsoft rep we spoke to wouldn't quite commit to calling it a racing simulator, but did go on to say *Forza Motorsport 5* would be a mostly "authentic" racing experience. Everything from the environmental lighting when passing under trees, to the hyper-realistic

rendering of the cars themselves and even the ability to view the back-



ground from the car's side view mirrors should astound early adopters. Gameplay is fairly straightforward, with acceleration mapped to the right trigger button and braking on the left. The game also features a rewind button, which lets gamers reverse fortunes should they encounter some embarrassing spin outs. As for the driving experience itself, gamers will be pleased to know that you can feel the car accelerate from the bottom half of the controller, while feedback from braking is fed directly into the triggers.

RYSE: SON OF ROME

If you're looking for the Xbox One "showcase" demo of E3, *Ryse: Son of Rome* is probably it. It's a gorgeous display of fire, falling rubble, bloody combat and general Roman superiority. It's pretty fun, too. The deftly animated melee combat

reminds us a little of *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, but with a more mature bent. After chopping away at a few enemies, players are presented with a kill sequence allowing them to follow a few on-screen button prompts to up the ante of the execution sequence. Once this sequence starts, your character is pretty much guaranteed to come out victorious. The challenge of *Ryse* is in mastering the gameplay. It was fun, challenging and darn pretty. All in all, this feels like a solid launch title and an exclusive that really shows off what the hardware can do. — Joseph Volpe





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Xbox One SmartGlass

SmartGlass is nothing new — it's the second-screen solution Microsoft introduced for its Xbox legions. But for the release of the Xbox One console, the company decided to update the experience and extend the functionality. Culling feedback from the many developers and gamers that have downloaded the app since its initial release, Microsoft came to some near-unanimous conclusions: gam-



ers use it as an Xbox Live controller and devs love its use of HTML and Javascript. So where to go from there? If you've been paying attention to any of the company's E3 announcements, you'll know that the newly updated SmartGlass app now includes support for in-game DLC purchases, gameplay assists and a DVR-like replay feature.

Microsoft opted for its own Surface tablet to showcase the new SmartGlass, but unfortunately, we didn't have it connected to a running Xbox One unit. So the experience we demoed is pretty much

what you can expect when you're out of the house. Upon launching the app — the speed of which has been "dramatically improved" — the initial SmartGlass screen will display your most recently played game and featured content. From there, you can explore the various, new second-screen features Microsoft's tacked on for games, all in that familiar Windows 8 Modern UI-style.

For now, *Ryse: Son of Rome* is the only Xbox One game we've seen taking advantage of the new SmartGlass. Enter into the SmartGlass experience for that game and you'll be privy to about eight separate features: Overview, Achievement Progress, Extras (for DLC purchases), timed Challenges, Friends' Achievements (based on your friend list), Game Clips (for gameplay replay, or as MS calls it "Game DVR"), Related games and Gallery (for your in-game shots). SmartGlass will also help players along with a feature called Timeline that offers gameplay videos to those that encounter difficulties with specific quests or achievements. — Joseph Volpe

PRICE: FREE APP

AVAILABILITY: NOVEMBER 2013

THE BREAKDOWN: SMARTGLASS GETS IN-GAME PURCHASES, GAMEPLAY ASSISTANCE AND DVR-ESQUE REPLAYS.





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Wii U Gaming Roundup

Nintendo's Wii U may not be the main star of this year's E3, but that doesn't mean the company's sitting this year out. *Super Mario 3D World*, *Bayonetta 2* and *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD* were just some of the titles that Nintendo's showing off. We'll direct you to our friends at Joystiq for more detailed impressions of Nintendo's E3 2013 lineup, but we've got a quick run through of two of those titles — among what we consider to be Nintendo's biggest games at the big game show.

PRICE: TBD

AVAILABILITY: VARIES

**THE BREAKDOWN: A GLIMPSE AT THE
Wii U'S HEAVY HITTERS INCLUDING
MARIO, LUIGI AND BAYONETTA.**

SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD

Stop searching through castle after castle: this is the Mario you are looking for on Wii U. *Super Mario 3D World* is the closest we've gotten so far to a new *Mario Galaxy* game, and perhaps the closest thing we've gotten to a sequel to the Mario classic *Super Mario 64*. And not just that, the game takes the 3D Mario formula we've

seen in the past — from special hats enabling various "suits," to vertical-



oriented level design — and adds in a new twist: a throw back to the not-quite-a-Mario-game *Super Mario Bros.*

2. You can choose from one of four characters before jumping in — Mario, Luigi, Toad and Princess Peach — each of which have the same abilities from the NES classic. Peach's trademark jumpfloat is in there, and Luigi's fast as all get out. There's also a new cat suit, which is both adorable and a neat new twist on the traditional 3D Mario gameplay. It launches for the Wii U this December.



BAYONETTA 2

Bayonetta 2 is ... well, it's the same madness you first experienced in the original *Bayonetta*. The titular character is back for another bout of third-person action. The demo we played had us taking on fantastical enemies, some atop armored horses, all the while fighting on a Harrier jet. So, yeah, it's even crazier than the previous game, and apparently the bullet shoes Bayonetta wore in the first game aren't making a return — she's got a whip instead, which keeps enemies at bay from a safe distance. Not only is *Bayonetta 2* a fun, ridiculous ride, but it's also an important third-party exclusive for Nintendo — it currently has a 2014 launch window. — Ben Gilbert





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Oculus Rift HD Prototype

We've been impressed with Oculus Rift from the start, and have been following the VR headset closely ever since. The number one request from users and devs? A higher-resolution screen than the 1,280 x 800 panel in the dev device. Well, after months of research and tinkering to find the right hardware combination, team Oculus is finally ready to show off a Rift with a 1,920 x 1,080 display, and we got to demo the thing.

Before heading into the land of 1080p, we got to explore a demo built with Unreal Engine 4 in the existing dev headset. After looking around a snowy mountain

PRICE: TBD

AVAILABILITY: PROTOTYPE STAGE

THE BREAKDOWN: THE RIFT HD IS STILL IN ITS INFANCY, BUT 60 FPS IN FULL HD IMPROVES THE ALREADY ATTRACTIVE VR UNIT.

stronghold inhabited by a fire lord in low res, we switched to the exact same demo running at 60 fps on the HD prototype device — and

the difference was immediately apparent. Surface textures could be seen in much higher fidelity. Colors were brighter and less muddied and the general detail of the entire environment was greatly improved.

When we chatted with Palmer Luckey and Nate Mitchell about the HD prototype, they stressed that the headset we saw was very much a proof-of-concept device — a way to let folks see just how good HDVR is. We do know that it's "the best display we've used yet," according to Nate, and that it's an LED-backlit LCD display that's both thinner and lighter than the screen in the dev unit. While the internals are different, the optics are identical to those being used in the dev headset, so the edges of the screen could be seen during the demo. That kept it from being a fully immersive experience, but both Palmer and Nate assured us that new optics are in development to eliminate the problem. — Michael Gorman





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Virtuix Omni VR Treadmill

PRICE: \$399+

AVAILABILITY: JANUARY 2014

THE BREAKDOWN: WHEN PAIRED WITH THE OCULUS RIFT, OMNI GETS YOU UP AND MOVING FOR VR EXPERIENCES.

I'm a little nauseous and a bit sweaty. This was my first time using the Oculus Rift. It's the sort of thing you've got to ease into, really — sitting stationary, letting your brain adjust to the whole experience. Or you could just pop the thing on and run in place on a treadmill in a downtown Los Angeles hotel suite. Your call, really. Have I seen the future? Hard to say, of course, but whatever it was that



just happened was neat.

Virtuix's CEO, Jan Goetgeluk took me through the paces of the system, a stationary design he settled on after toying around with a more traditional treadmill model. The Omni is really quite a simple thing at its heart: a concave, slick surface attached to two bars that converge in a circle. The company's designed special soles, as well — plastic pieces raised at the heel and ball of the foot, with a fabric friction surface on the toe. Of course, it takes some getting used to, and Goetgeluk stood aside as I learned to walk again: lean forward, step down on the heel and let the rest of your foot slide with it.

Once you've mastered that, you can turn, run and jump. You can also let go of the circle around your waist — if you're not too tall, that is. I'm around 5'11 or so. Not huge, by any means, but the prototype isn't easy to adjust, apparently. That means, essentially, that I couldn't wear the waist belt harness that secures you to the circle, so you can run around hands-free. Instead, I had to hold the ring with one hand while shooting with the other. It's probably a bit hyperbolic to call the experience "fully immersive," but man, it's easy to get lost in the game — so long as you can forget that there are other people watching. The sound of plastic soles shuffling on the surface is cacophonous, but not overwhelming, and the whole thing is relatively low impact on your feet, in spite of the fact that the demo version involves loafers. — Brian Heater





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Mad Catz M.O.J.O.

We shoved our way through the floor-opening scrum and made a bee-line to Mad Catz's booth at E3 after catching word of the peripheral maker's new M.O.J.O. Android gaming console — a box the company promises will be the most powerful in its class when it arrives this holiday season. The rep we spoke with wouldn't talk specific specs on the thing — in fact, the company says that those are still in the works, and while it doesn't actually know itself, it promises to blow the competition (*cough OUYA*) out of the water. While everything's still in beta at the moment, things seem to be working all right. We played a quick round of *Riptide*, and things went swimmingly (well, save for the fact that we're not all that great at *Riptide*).

Also a bragging point is the relative openness of it all, eschewing the

walled-garden approach to give users direct access to the Google Play and Amazon app stores, so you're good to go with the games you've already purchased, and while Mad Catz may not be working directly with most of the game makers, it's promising compatibility via open standards. As for the box itself, it's not a bad-looking object. It's palm-sized and extremely light, with a bit of an angular, beveled appearance and the company's scratch-marked logo along the top in red (as well as a few accidental scuffs on its shiny surface). The micro-console will also ship with the C.T.R.L. wireless gamepad, an Xbox-like controller that features a dual-mode Bluetooth v4.0 radio and settings that will let you use it across a spectrum of different titles. — Brian Heater



PRICE: TBD

AVAILABILITY:
LATE 2013

THE BREAKDOWN:

**MAD CATZ JUMPS
INTO THE ANDROID
CONSOLE FRAY
WITH ITS OWN
WIDE-OPEN
COMPACT UNIT.**





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Hot on the heels of refreshing its X51 gaming desktop, Dell is sharing the news gamers have really been waiting for. The company just unveiled some fresh Alienware laptops, complete with a new look and even a new naming scheme: Alienware 14, 17 and 18. As you'd expect, they step up to Haswell processors, the latest NVIDIA graphics and 802.11ac on some models, but the real story is that they've received a serious makeover, the first in six years. For starters, Dell ditched the ol' plastic body and moved to a metal chassis with an aluminum lid and magnesium alloy chassis.

As befits an Alienware, there are LEDs aplenty, including lights around the edges and a touchpad that fully lights up. And though the alien logo on the lid always glowed, that color is now customizable like other zones on the laptop. Speaking of the

keyboard, you get 10 color zones on the 17 / 18 and five on the 14, and it promises improved travel, too, thanks to some retooled key caps. Dell also added Klipsch speakers, backed by Dolby Audio Theater.

Moving on to performance, Dell added some macro keys on the larger models, with the 18 supporting up to nine, and the 17 allowing for four. A 750GB HDD is the minimum, and SSDs will be available too. On the 14, in particular, you can add up to three HDDs, while the two larger notebooks have room for four. Graphics-wise, NVIDIA's GTX 765M (2GB) is standard on the 17 and 18, while the 14 starts with a 1GB 750M. And on the 18 you get two GPUs by default, in an SLI setup. As for displays, they're all IPS screens (non-touch), and while

1080p is offered on all, it's only standard on the 18 (the 14, in particular, starts with 1,366 x 768, blech).

— Dana Wollman

PRICE: \$1,199 - \$2,099

AVAILABILITY: NOW AVAILABLE

THE BREAKDOWN: ALIENWARE'S TRIO NABS HASWELL SILICON AND A NEW LOOK WITH IPS DISPLAYS ALL AROUND.

THE ENGADGET INTERVIEW

Eiji Aonuma



E3
ELECTRONIC
ENTERTAINMENT
EXPO 2013

**The *Zelda* producer
on the Wii U's
stumbles, Virtual
Console support and
a 'need to evolve'**
By Joseph Volpe

TIT'S COOL TO BE DIFFERENT. That's the message we typically feed our children when they come up against peer opposition. It's also an attitude Nintendo's adopted time and time again when its penchant for innovation, aversion to hardcore gameplay and reliance on classic franchises have put the company in a perceived last-place position. But, as it's continually proven — and most successfully with the Wii — you can't ever definitively count the *Mario* hitmaker out.





There always seems to be an ace in the company's IP sleeve that keeps bringing gamers and its diehard fanbase back to the fold. But we have to wonder: how long will that last? It's a question we posed directly to Eiji Aonuma, Nintendo's Most Valuable Player #2 and *Zelda* mastermind, this week at E3. And his answer might surprise you: "If we don't change, we might die. We need to evolve. Things need to change. Things need to grow." It's a sobering admission, especially considering the source.

The IP ace this time around falls upon the *Zelda* franchise's shoulders, except not in the way we've come to expect. The two newest titles in the series, headed to the 3DS and Wii U, also happen to be recycled efforts: a reimagining of *A Link to the Past* and an HD reboot of *The Wind Waker*, both headed up by Aonuma. Perhaps it's just a consequence of franchise fatigue and player familiarity, but there's something more alarming, more distressing about this back catalog mining; something Aonuma's all too aware of. It's also something he's actively steering his production teams away from, while at the same time attempting to take it all in as a greater lesson for a company so tethered to video gaming's past. So to catch some deeper perspective on Nintendo's next-gen leanings, its level of self-awareness and the future of *Zelda*, we sat down with Aonuma for what turned out to be an honest and refreshing chat.

"If I continue making remakes, I feel like I won't grow."

That's how Aonuma responded to the possibility of producing more classic HD remakes for the Wii U, of which the upcoming *Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD* is the first. It'd be easy to dismiss his team's work on that Wii U title as a lazy Band-Aid solution to the console's weak first-party release schedule. Easy, that is, until you consider its greater purpose: it's a training tool. And that's according to the man, himself. *Twilight Princess* and *Skyward Sword* were also considered as HD do-

"If we don't change we might die. We need to evolve. Things need to change. Things need to grow."





overs, but it was the *Wind Waker* conversion that showed the most promising and dramatic results. For Aonuma, development on *The Wind Waker HD* has helped his production team “learn what it is the Wii U can do... [and] what the system is capable of.” All lessons he intends to apply to the development of future Wii U titles.

Yet, for all this humbling self-awareness, there’s a persistent contradiction that threads through our conversation about Nintendo’s reliance on old IPs and its reluctance to make Virtual Console games plentiful on the Wii U. It’s a “one foot in the future, one deeply entrenched foot in the past” mindset that has Nintendo shooting itself in both feet, thus hampering its evolution. But as much as Aonuma would like to move on, his company’s having a hard time letting go of tried-and-true formulas for AAA franchises like *Zelda*. “With regard to... breaking the mold or changing the formula, I certainly hear the thoughts of fans; the impressions of fans that maybe it’s getting a bit stale.” But that understanding also comes with some heavy trepidation, with Aonuma pointing the finger at gamers and going on to explain that “... if we change it too much, I’m also concerned people will say, ‘Okay, is it no longer *Zelda* if we don’t have this formula?’”

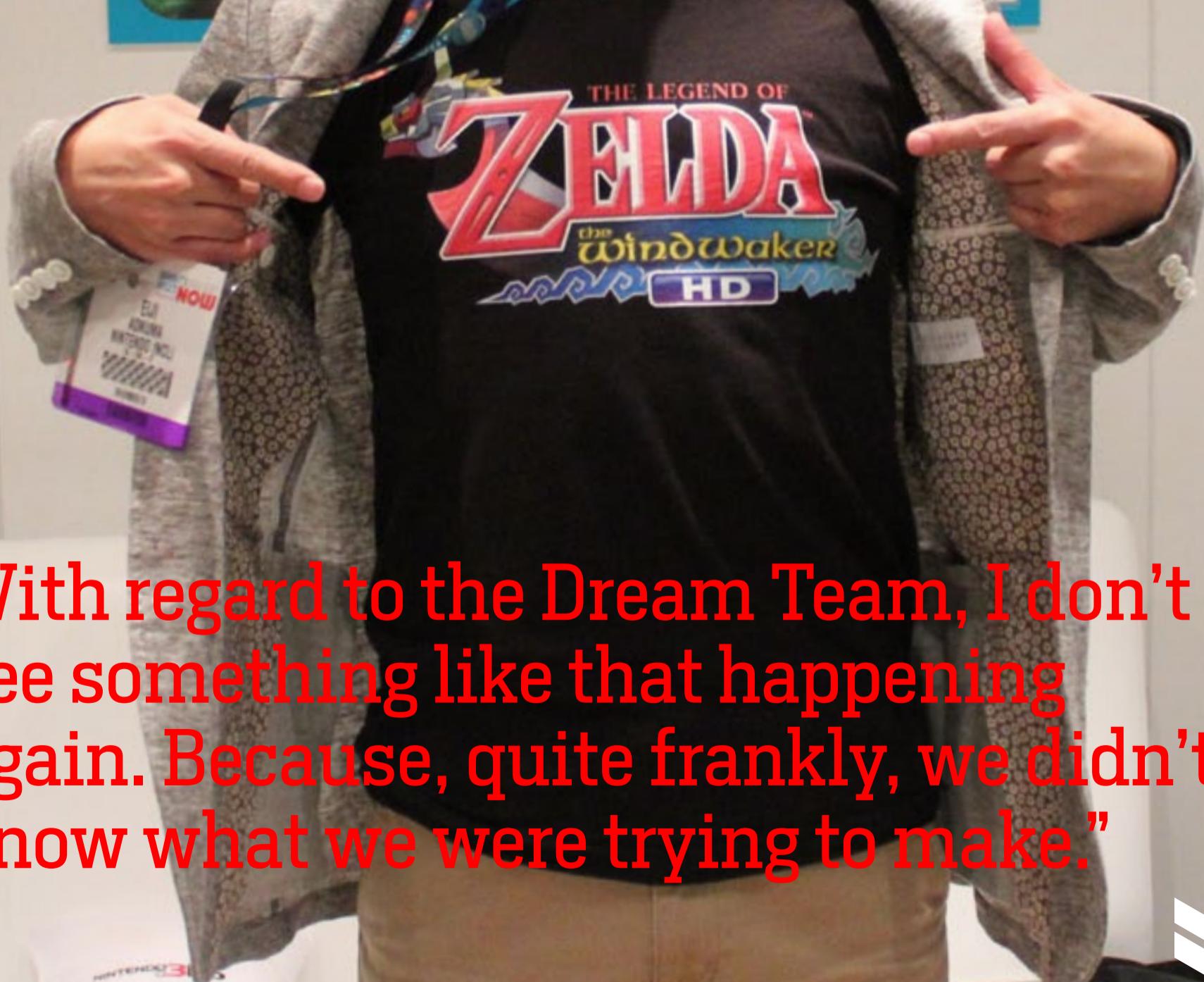
That’s not to say a new, radically different *Zelda* Wii U title isn’t coming. It is. His teams are currently developing the next-gen title, but unfortunately it’s not at a point where there’s anything relevant to show. Progress on the title’s also being held up by Nintendo’s development resources, or lack thereof. Right now, Aonuma’s teams are spread a bit thin across *A Link Between Worlds* and *The Wind Waker HD*, with

“If we change it too much, I’m also concerned people will say, ‘Okay, is it no longer *Zelda* if we don’t have this formula?’”





Aonuma proudly displays his threads bearing the logo for *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD* at E3 2013.



“With regard to the Dream Team, I don’t see something like that happening again. Because, quite frankly, we didn’t know what we were trying to make.”



priority going to that latter title. So before Nintendo can make any serious headway on *Zelda Wii U* — let alone make the title's existence public — *The Wind Waker HD* needs to be completed. When it does eventually come to light, gamers may even be able to control a fully playable Princess Zelda (or even Sheik, Zelda's occasional other form). Or, at least, Aonuma seemed open to the idea when we asked him about it. It's a possibility and we can always hope.

Nintendo had a six-year lead-up to this new console generation, giving the company more than ample time to get the handle of HD development and learn from its rivals. But as Aonuma explained, "HD requires resources — resources in the form of money, in the form of people ... in the form of time." Almost all of which Nintendo appears to lack, save for the money. So how to remedy this situation? When we suggested the possibility of a second-party approach, something along the lines of the N64's "Dream Team" strategy, Aonuma laughed. "With regard to the Dream Team, I don't see something like that happening again. Because, quite frankly ... we didn't know what we were trying to make. And then we brought people from the outside in to help us create this thing we weren't really clear on."

The end results of that strategy are now a thing of history, but Nintendo is adapting to the current gaming climate. There is a "solid vision" in place for outside developer support, one that has the company actively seeking out studios and "people who have the powers to make our ideas a reality." It's the Nintendo magic the company's after and if it can find that talent, perhaps we'll see a more plentiful release schedule. That's if (and this is a *big if*) Nintendo can get over its own stubborn perfectionism.

It's a hurdle at the forefront of Aonuma's mind; a mentality Aonuma referred to as being *furui*, meaning "old" or "antiquated" in Japanese. He went on to explain that, "the way we make games is we're very careful. We're very thorough. We're very detailed. We take a long time analyzing the different parts of a game ... almost to our detriment. Almost too careful. I think the need is there for us to make





decisions more quickly, weigh the risks [and] see what the payoff is.” It’s not the sort of navel-gazing confession we’re used to hearing from the traditionally proud Nintendo and its star developers. Nonetheless, it’s a reassuring sign of the change to come. Nintendo’s already put some of these risk-taking practices into place and Aonuma assured us that we’d start to see the fruits of this shift come next year. And when it does arrive, you can expect a more open take on gameplay that straddles the overlap of Western and Japanese gaming trends. A happy cultural medium, if you will.

When we pressed about the lack of Virtual Console games on Wii U, Aonuma pushed back, saying that “for people that’ve played the [classic games] already, you can’t just give them something they’ve already experienced. You need to make it something special, something different. That’s something I’m always very conscious about.” The concept of “added value” was something Aonuma stressed repeatedly throughout our talk, so it’s clear the man’s sights are not set on the gold mines of gamer nostalgia. Regardless, Nintendo’s Virtual Console strategy isn’t really something Aonuma has much control over. He doesn’t get to call the shots on what games make the whitelist and when.

“We take a long time analyzing the different parts of a game almost to our detriment. Almost too careful. I think the need is there for us to make decisions more quickly, weigh the risks [and] see what the payoff is.”

So what of this new *Wind Waker*? Is it really any different? According to Aonuma, the Wii U version should look “more like a puppet show than like an animation.” He’s referring, of course, to Nintendo’s polarizing decision to go with a cel-shaded look back during the GameCube title’s original release. With the power of the Wii U, his team’s been able to make the





“The concept of the item will be completely different than what you’ve experienced before.”



Aonuma seeks to “break the mold” for gameplay in the forthcoming *Zelda Wii U* title to expand exploration.

edges of 3D objects appear “clearer and more crisp ... so there’s actually a bit of depth”, as opposed to the original’s flat, 2D-ish cartoon style.

Aonuma only lightly touched upon the ways in which he’s attempting to “break the mold” with *Zelda Wii U* and, in particular, the player’s use of items. In fact, he directed our attention to the private demo of *A Link Between Worlds* (not the show floor version) for evidence of how he intends to change the concept of items. “We’re trying to find new ways to play. Not only the kinds of items you find, but how you use those items. I want to give the player more freedom. I want them to be able to explore more.” How that will actually play out for *Zelda Wii U* and its 3DS companion, we’re not sure.

But before our interview came to a close and we headed out the door, Aonuma expounded on the idea further, adding this tease: “The concept of the item will be completely different than what you’ve experienced before.” Had any other devel-

oper said that, certainly one without such a hit-making track record, we would’ve been quick to dismiss it as famous last words; a surefire, hyperbolic nail in the coffin. Fortunately, this is Eiji Aonuma we’re talking about. The man that made *Ocarina of Time* and *Majora’s Mask* indelible gaming memories. And for that, we’re willing to reserve a little faith. Ⓛ

Joseph Volpe is ambiguously ethnic. He is also a Senior Associate Editor at Engadget.



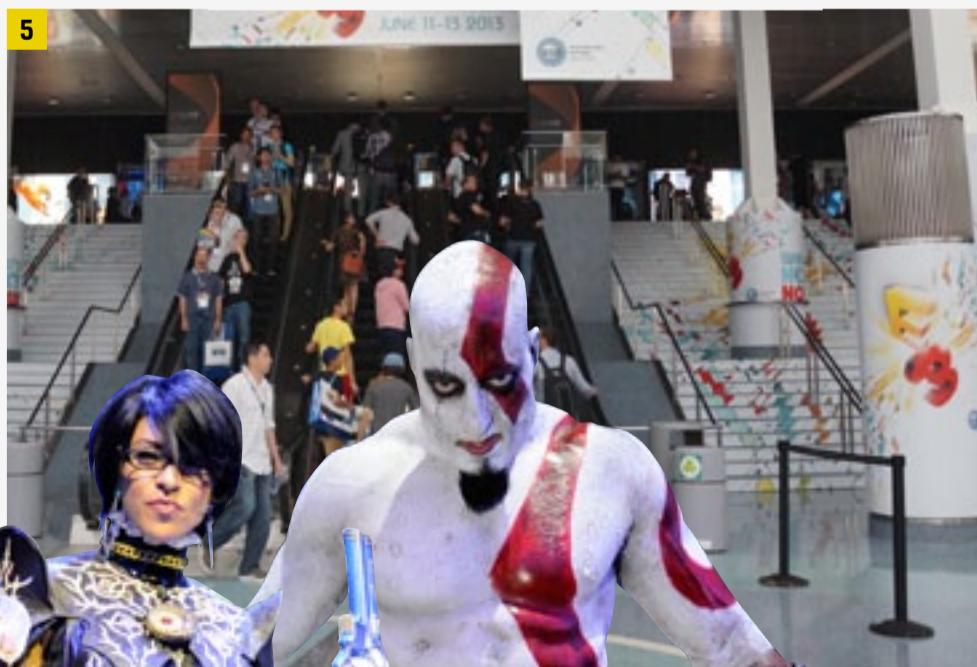
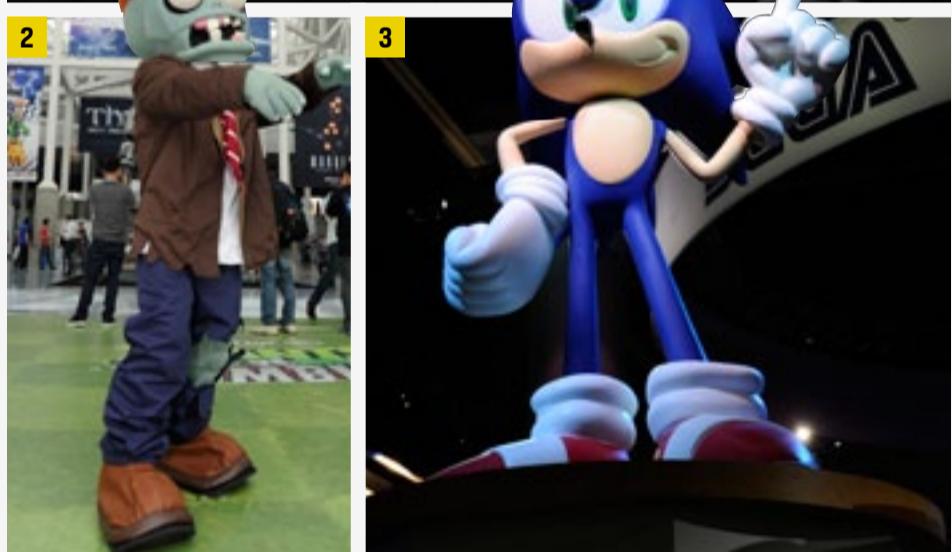
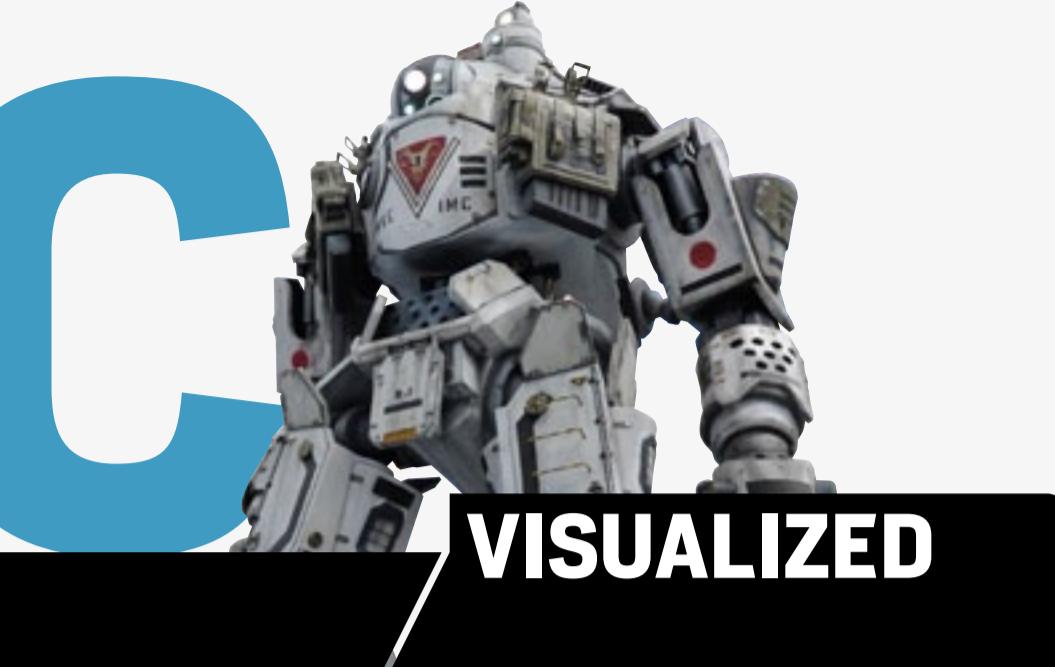
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ON THE FLOOR AT E3: Icons and Action

As the console war keynote trolling came to a close, we headed to the show floor to take the edge off. It was thick with retro consoles and characters, cone-headed zombies and even a real spaceship. 1. A *Titanfall* mech guards the E3 entrance. 2. *Plants vs. Zombies* hits the floor in search of brainz. 3. *Sonic the Hedgehog* stands tall. 4. *Disney Infinity* pimps Cinderella's ride. 5. Entering E3. 6. Bayonetta and Kratos (*God of War*) pose for the camera.



7. Xbox One demos the Kinect 2.0 sensor. 8. SpaceX's Dragon capsule. 9. Atari remembers the '70s in this retro gaming room. 10. Attendees take a test drive at the *Gran Turismo 6* booth. 11. A *Marvel Super Heroes* mural gets the full Lego treatment. 12. *Diablo III*'s Tyrael: Archangel of Justice. 13. Alph the engineer spaces out at the Nintendo *Pikmin 3* booth.



MARKUS 'NOTCH' PERSSSON

The *Minecraft* creator on high-precision nerdery and the evolution of nature's most intuitive interface



What gadget do you depend on most?

I can't get myself to give up on my HTC Desire Z. It's a quite dated Android cellphone by now, but the physical keyboard is perfect for tweeting, and it takes horribly blurry pictures.

Which do you look back upon most fondly?

The Game Boy Advance, definitely. Great selection of games, horrible unlit screen and interesting form factor.

Which company does the most to push the industry?

Right now, I'm most excited about the Oculus Rift by Oculus VR, Inc. High-precision nerdery driven by a strong passion that rubs off on anyone that touches it.

What is your operating system of choice?

The one I use the most is Windows 7, but for laptops, nothing beats the way OS X handles touchpad input and gestures.

What are your favorite gadget names?

I'm quite fond of anything obviously named by an engineer. The more Greek letters and references to old mythology, the better.

What are your least favorite?

Anything in the format "The AdjectiveNoun(tm)."

Which app do you depend on most?

Twitter or Spotify, depending on if I'm currently procrastinating or not.

What traits do you most deplore in a smartphone?

Non-USB cable chargers. I finally got over my hatred of non-replaceable batteries. Phones tend to get outdated by the time you need to replace the battery anyway.

Which do you most admire?

Physical keyboards, although they're definitely rare these days.

What is your idea of the perfect device?

Hands. No tools have ever gotten

“I’m quite fond of anything obviously named by an engineer. The more Greek letters and references to old mythology, the better.”



close to being as intuitive or versatile as what nature has evolved for us.

What is your earliest gadget memory?

I remember disassembling and putting an old analog alarm clock together. It was a lot of fun figuring out why it still worked with that one spring missing.

What technological advancement do you most admire?

The speed at which modern CPUs perform computations still blows my mind daily. The way this allows us to really apply math to solve a wide range of problems, or just change the intensity of millions of LED lights 60 [times] per second just to entertain us, is mind-blowing.

Which do you most despise?

Anything designed to hurt other people, such as weapons or YouTube comments. Other than that, I find it hard to despise tools. Some are less useful, but I don't despise them.

What fault are you most tolerant of in a gadget?

Bad documentation. I like exploring gadgets myself, and find it exciting when the documentation is wrong.

Which are you most intolerant of?

Bad pixels, or other "tolerable" flaws that really shouldn't be.

When has your smartphone been of the most help?

Google Maps to find out where I am and where I'm supposed to go. The fact that the GPS eats battery just adds to the excitement.

What device do you covet most?

I already have it, but a good keyboard is invaluable when you spend a lot of time typing. My favorite one is the ancient IBM Model M I have at home.

If you could change one thing about your phone what would it be?

I would make the battery last longer than half a day of heavy use.

What does being connected mean to you?

Access to the internet.

When are you least likely to reply to an email?

Any email that contains the words "important" or "urgent" never are, and annoy me to the point of not replying out of principle.

When did you last disconnect?

Many years ago; I don't even remember. I've tried a few times, but never last longer than a day or two. ➤



The week that was in 140 characters or less

Watching the Watchmen, iTuning In and the Porto Pro

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ESC

REHASHED

@MrZapasant

“PS4 has murdered the Xbox One!
Oh thank heavens!
Here comes the ambulance!! *Wii-U
Wii-U Wii-U Wii-U*

@ConanOBrien

Well, well, well. Two can play at this game. I just started following the @NSA.

@mariojoze

man, itunes radio is outrageously mediocre and millions of people will use it

@RealJeffHarjo

Xbox Boss: “If you’re offline, get a 360.” I’ll probably get a PS4 instead. #Options

@caseyjohnston

Mac Pro features uniquely rollable design; no more lugging your tower from office to office when you move.

THE STRIP

BY SEAN PRYOR

THE REC Room



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TIME
MACHINES

WHAT IS THIS?
TOUCH TO FIND OUT



NINTENDO FAMICOM

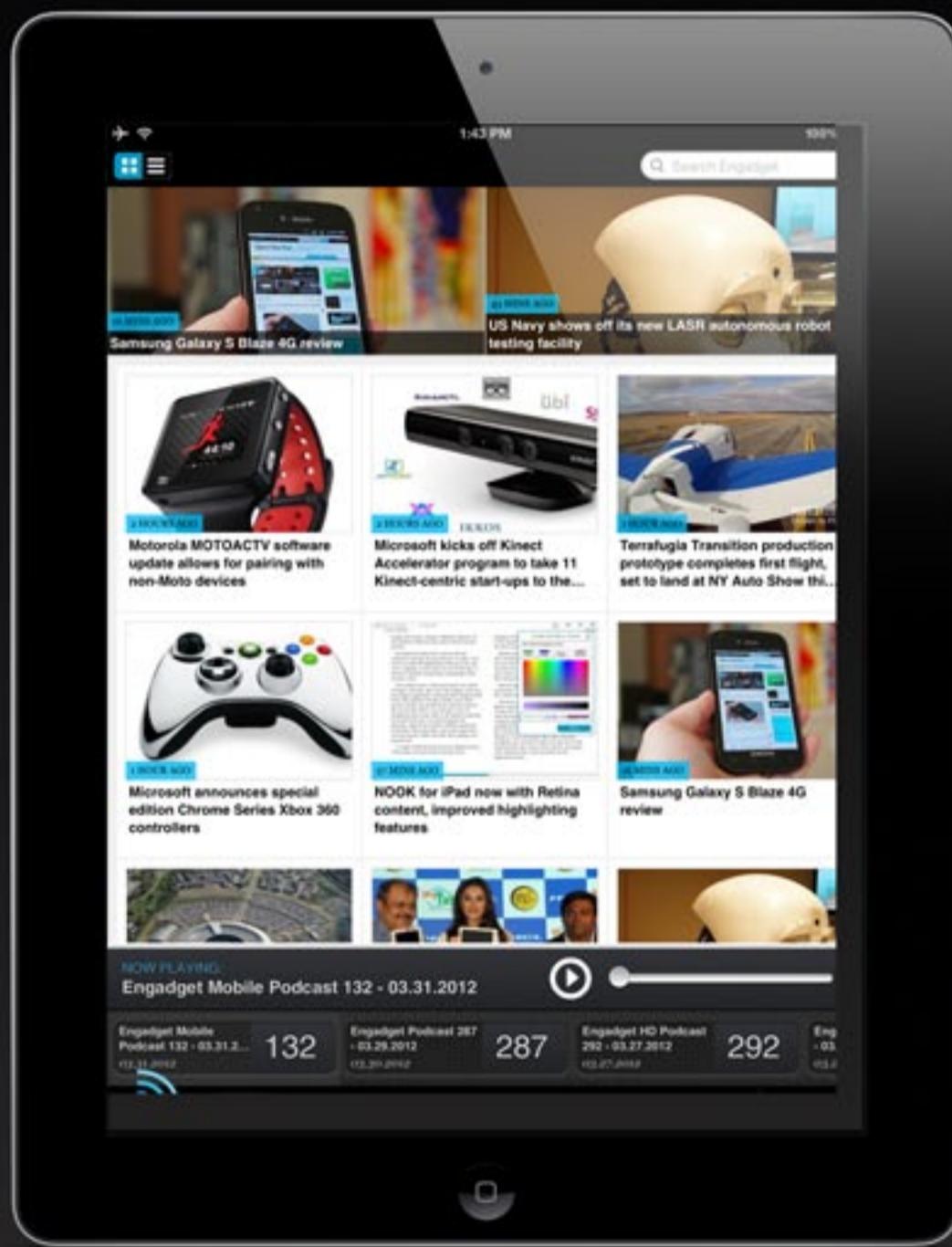


July 15th marks the 30th anniversary of Japan's original Nintendo gaming system known as the Family Computer (or Famicom). The console was released in Japan in 1983, at a time when the US market was heading into a dismal period for video game sales. The Famicom was the precursor to the immensely popular NES — essentially the same machine in a new casing — which, when released in the US in 1985, managed to stoke the flames of home gaming for years to come. In Japan, the Famicom had continued success and in 1986, Nintendo added the Famicom Disk System (FDS) peripheral that used a proprietary floppy format as an alternative to game cartridges. Sharp even went on to license the product as the Sharp Twin Famicom, which offered both the cartridge-based Famicom and the FDS all as one machine.



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